# LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

A MAGAZINE FOR THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE

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# Editor's Notes

## L. A. G. Strong

SEVERAL writers, and a few readers, have written to ask whether the new editorship means any change of policy. One of the writers puts it bluntly: "What kind of stuff do you want?"

I want the best stories I can get, and of as many kinds as possible. Most magazines have a recognized "slant". Even the justly celebrated *Story* of America prefers certain definite types. I do not want *Lovat Dickson's Magazine* to have a "slant", but to welcome the best of every type—plot stories, character stories, atmosphere stories, tragic, comic, urban, rural, naïf, satirical; all kinds. My definition of the short story is a wide-open one. To quote once more what I have said elsewhere: "We not only do not know what a good short story ought to be, but we do not want to know. All we want is that each piece of short prose fiction should have an aim worthy of an artist and should succeed in hitting it." And, if that sounds too serious, it must be remembered that an artist is as much entitled to amuse himself as anybody is.

A magazine of this kind is not out to please any one reader, but to give hospitality to the most vital work that is being done. It ought to cause controversy, to rouse violent likes and dislikes. Vitality is the real test. I like any kind of story that adds to my experience of life. I want first-hand stuff: but the

best of first-hand stuff is useless unless it is given significant form.

A reader asks if we will print poems. I think not. Plenty of other journals print poems, and we need our precious space for the short story. Another wants to know if we will have more articles. One, or, at most, two, per number: and for the same reasons. The serious, non-commercial short story has shamefully few platforms. We mean to provide one. How long we can maintain it depends upon you, the readers.

# The King is Dead

## Patrick Carleton

SUMER—3000 B.C.

Our King died about the end of the ninth month. He had been ill for a long time, and that month the omens had been very bad. When the new moon appeared it stayed in the sky all night and only sank at sunrise. The priests say that this is the worst sign of all, signifying that the reign of the ruler is at an end and that there will be years of violence and great hunger. When they saw it, they carried the gods in procession about the city and told us all to purify ourselves; but it did no good. Then a hyena came in through the gates at midday and walked up the street. No one dared to kill it until the priests had been told, and by that time it had escaped again. I asked a priest who was in the Great House what it meant. He pretended not to hear me, but that night there was singing and drum-beating in the Temple, and our captain told us that if anyone knew he had committed a sin he was to go home and not come back to the Great House until the gods had forgiven him.

The doctors were with the King all the time. None of his women were allowed near him. He slept in a room off the little court on the east of the Great House, and the threshold was smeared with pitch and lime to keep the devils out. I was on duty in the little court at night, with two others, Luenlil and

Zida. Luenlil was the eldest of us, a dark man, who came from somewhere across the river and had no kin in the city. He had fought against the Elamites, and showed us the scar on his side where an axe had caught him. Zida was the son of a merchant. He and I were friends. We never talked about what would happen if the King died; but we were glad when Luenlil pointed to his scar, saying that if the doctors could cure a wound like that they could cure anything. We could hear the doctors talking when they went in and out of the court. They sometimes sat there, too, to prepare their medicines. At first, they did only simple things like putting gold bracelets on the King's wrists and giving him beer to drink that had had seven herbs bruised in it. We used to watch them, but there was not much to see: only two or three old men sitting in the shade of a yellow wall, sorting herbs and pouring things from one jar into another. They had some small tablets with writing on them that they looked at, reading out names to one another, and there was one of them, a little fat man, who used to watch the stars at night. Luenlil said they were making slow work of the King's sickness because they were paid by the day. That was before the omens began. Later on, I saw a man bring a dead fox into the court at sunset. The doctors cooked it. Luenlil said: "They never gave me roast fox to eat when I was sick."

"You were not the King," Zida told him.

The Great House began to be very quiet now. Few people came in or out, and when the slaves got water from the well in the middle court they did not laugh or quarrel; and they were not beaten any more. Usually, a couple were beaten every day. Slaves are always idle. But when a place is to be cleaned of bad influences no one may be punished in it. One would have thought this would make the slaves noisy and impudent; but it did not. They were as quiet as the doctors. There was no

noise in the town either. At night, it was as though the air were made of wool and you could not hear through it. The jackals squealed in the desert outside the walls, as they always do; and that was all. Luenlil and Zida and I sat on our bench with our spears resting beside us, and watched the moon. Its light lay in the court like very still water, making such black shadows that you would have thought that you could pick them up. I wondered whether there were devils in the shadows, or whether devils lived in the walls and came out at night. There was a feeling of something coming nearer to us all the time. It might have come out of the walls, for it was on every side of us at once, moving at us very slowly, like flood water moving up the bank of a canal when the dry ridges and the bush-roots disappear so gently that you never actually see them go. You look away, and when you look back again you find the water has covered them. A man has no protection against devils when they come up out of the chasms under the earth. He can only ask the gods to help him; and they do not help much or often.

Once, when the feeling was at its worst, I looked at Zida. He was sitting next to me on the bench, and I could see in the moonlight that his face had gone smooth and still like a clay face, all the living and thinking closed away behind it, held back. His mouth and nostrils were so still that he might not have been breathing. It was as if he were dead now. But I did not want him to be dead. He was my friend. I took hold of his arm where it came out from under the sheepskin that he wore. The flesh was cool and smooth for my fingers. I said:

"Zida, do not look like that. It frightens me."

He turned round to me. His face still meant nothing and I could not see his eyes because there was a shadow across them. His voice was far-off too: voice and living all taken a long way

back, away from his face and body which were the things I knew of him.

"We are all frightened," he said.

"Zida, Zida, do you want to die?"

"You must not speak that word: not now, not here. It is unlucky."

"I do not want to die. Why are you sitting here and waiting for death to find you when she finds the King?"

"You must not say it. You are calling to death to come if you use her name."

"It's you who are calling her. I can see it in your face. You were calling her with your heart, telling her you would go with her. She will hear your heart and know. But I do not want to go with her."

We did not say any more then; but I knew that Zida had turned his heart away from life and toward death; that he had been sitting beside me playing at being dead already; and I was angry. Zida was my nearest friend. He was a strong young man, and when he was only seventeen he had killed a lion. Why should he go with death now, before he married or saw his children or led a regiment? The country where death lives is called Land of No Return and it lies underground toward the west. Dust, they say, settles continually on its bolts and locks. The people who have gone there see no light; sit in the dark. In all the Great House, now, people were thinking of this country; were beginning to make promises to death; and I knew death would hear them and come in her own time. There was a story that one of the women had wakened at midnight and seen a man black as pitch, wearing a red mourning-cloak, at the door of her room. He had a bow in his left hand and a sword in his right, and she knew he had come from underground. She called out to him: "I am ready," and he vanished. But for my part, I was not ready.

There were more doctors with the King now. Some of them had come a long way to our city. The whole world knew that he was sick, and in temples so far off that I had never heard their names, the priests were pouring out water and taking the omens for him, and killing sheep and asking the gods to take the sheep's head for his head and the sheep's heart for his heart. Perhaps no one in the world would dare to live when he was gone. He was the ruler.

At sunrise, the second day after I had spoken to Zida, two of the doctors came out of the room where the King was. One of them was a new man. He had a long beard over his chest and his hair curled with gold wires like a nobleman. I heard him say: "But his face is yellow."

I knew then that Zida and the others in the Great House had thought about death too long that she had heard them thinking and was on her way. Everyone was waiting for her, was willing to go down underground with her and the King, into the Land of No Return. I was not willing.

The other doctor said:

"Yes, even the tongue is yellow now. The sickness comes from the liver. The devil called the Grasper has caught hold of his liver and is killing him."

The new doctor spread his hands out. I saw they were stained with the drugs he had been using. The two were quite near me. I could hear everything.

"When the Grasper has seized hold of a man's head and face and his whole body, even the root of the tongue, the doctor may not lay a hand on him. He will die and not mend."

I knew he was speaking the truth. The Grasper is the strongest of devils: stronger than the Nightwalker or the South Wind or even the Seven Messengers. The doctor who belonged to the city looked terribly afraid. He was the little

fat one who used to watch the stars. He played with the lapis-lazuli seal that was round his neck, his eyes going this way and that like birds dodging a hawk, and said:

"In the name of all gods, come with me to the temple and fetch priests. Let him die under their prayers, not our drugs."

They went out into the middle court. I watched them.

It was just sunrise. The top bricks of the courtyard wall had turned honey-coloured, warm looking. Luenlil had heard what the doctors said, too. He picked up his spear and began smoothing the shaft with the palm of his hand. Then he balanced it by the middle. "It is a good spear," he said. "It will be buried with me."

"May the Grasper take your tongue, too," I said. "May all the devils close your mouth."

I walked away from him and stood by myself, watching the sunlight slip down the wall from one course of bricks to another. After it had come down two courses, the priests arrived in their gold head-dresses all hung with shells and feathers. They had holy things with them: gold and silver vessels and the standards of the gods on tall poles. I watched them strip themselves naked and begin the rites. Many others crowded in too: ministers and governors with gold seals round their necks, women and soldiers. The priests poured water and lighted incense. They went in and out of the room where the King was, and the drums began to beat. There were three big drums that were played by two women each, and six little ones. Their noise crawled round and round the court like a thick snake: the first loud noise I had heard for so many days. The priests sang the spell of the Seven Messengers:

> "Those Seven are driven out from the mountain of night.
> Those Seven are expelled from the mountain of day.
> They stamp in the chasm of the earth.
> They walk in the desert of the earth."

They sang the whole of it, one loud line after another, with the drum-noise jarring and shuddering along the warm ground under our feet. They had the Seven and a lot of other devils, carved in tamarisk-wood, and they burned them and took the ashes in to sprinkle over the King. Then they held up their right hands to the standards and sang hymns. The others in the court sang too, under their breath, repeating just the names of the gods over and over. "O Nannar! O Ningal!" I would not sing with them; I thought, what use is there in asking the gods to help us against the devils? The devils rush up at us out of the ground. The gods strike down at us out of the sky. There is no difference. Death herself is a goddess, anyway, and she sends the devils. It is no use for us to ask Nannar and Ningal and Enlil and Ninlil and Enki and Damgin and the rest of them to keep up the life of the King. He is an old man, and the Grasper has got hold of his body and turned it yellow; so he will die. The gods keep life for themselves and leave death for us. Ziudsudra, who built the big ark when the flood came, is the only man they gave eternal life to. They will not do it again.

But somewhere behind my forehead, far away from the rest of me, was a calm, sure part which said that the King could not die.

The singing went on for a long time. The drummers who had the small drums took to beating them first on their foreheads and then on their knees, up and down and up and down, until they broke their foreheads and the blood crawled down very slowly, as thick as drum-music, over their eyebrows; was curly and red like worms. The priests were sweating, too, naked in the sun; and I thought they were going through the ceremonies very quickly, as though they felt something standing behind their backs and driving them. Priests are only men like the rest of us. It must have been almost noon when one

of them ran out of the doorway into the court, beating his head with hard knuckles as though he wanted to bleed like the drummers, and we knew the King was dead. Most of the noblemen pulled out their gold curling-wires and tore their hair. One of them, I did not know his name, dragged whole long curls out of his head and threw them on the ground and stamped on them. This made me think the King might be alive still; but when the priests began moving the holy standards away and putting out the incense, I was certain. Perhaps the praying and singing helped to kill him or perhaps they kept him alive longer. I do not know. Outside in the middle court the women called Mothers of Howling began the death-call, and kept it up all day and all night, because it was the King. I do not remember whether I ate anything; but at sunset I lay down by myself and went to sleep. I did not want to speak to anyone, or to feel any more, or to think.

When I woke next morning I was heavy and angry and my hands fumbled. I could shut my eyes and have darkness inside my head with broken streaks of pink going across it like coral-branches; but it did no good. I knew we should be called up soon. We were. They mustered us in the middle court in full kit, helmets and capes on, our spears in our hands and big shields on our arms, and our axes slung. It was strange, mustering as though it were an ordinary parade and seeing our captain—Enduggam, his name was, and he was my father's cousin—standing with one foot on the well-curb as he always did when he was going to talk to us, and remembering we had no King now. Zida was next to me. His face still meant nothing. I felt anger for a moment because he looked just as he had done before the King died. Holy gods, I wanted to say to him, it's over now. Why do you look like that still?

Enduggam began talking. My whole body felt tight and stretched as though I were hung up by straps under my arms.

I could see the sand and dung in the court as though it meant something. He said in the short loud voice he used to us:

"You know what has happened; and it is more loss for us, who must stay, than for you. We shall be in great misery, I dare say, for ten years or more. There is no luck in a land that has lost its ruler. But we must not think of that. Our King is going on a journey to the Land of No Return, so we have a duty. He must not enter the land like a beggar and knock on the gate; or drink ditch-water and eat mud like a poor man's ghost. He is the King, and he must come into the House of the Dark with his guards marching in front of him and his women walking behind him and his slaves carrying his fine things. Death is a great Queen, and our King must not be ashamed when he meets her. You will go with him. You will protect him and give him honour underground. That is the custom, and it is good for you. You will also have honour and an easy sleeping-place in the Land of No Return, if you enter it as soldiers of a great King."

I thought of everything that would happen. I could see it as clearly as I saw Enduggam standing with his foot on the well-curb and resting his hand on the shaft of his long club. They would make a deep pit first, as wide as the courtyard, and a sloping way to it. They would strangle the slaves there, laying them out side by side, thick over all the floor of the grave, and build a stone house for the King over their bodies. They would strangle us outside the house and lay us in front of the door to guard it, with our spears in our hands. Then, when they had made offerings, they would put back the earth; would put loads of earth over us, earth thickening between us and the light, so that it filled our mouths and entered the space between our arms and our bodies, pressing us. We should lie in the thickness of earth and follow the old King, crawling after him down the dark like worms, crawling along

into the country underground where there is nothing but dust and silence, guarding the King.

Enduggam was saying: "It is good and honourable for you, and you will obey gladly."

I thought of kneeling at the the door of the tomb whilst they put the string round my neck and stopped my breath with it. I thought of the soil piled on us.

"I do not think one of you will fear the custom. You will know your duty. But if one does fear, he may go."

I put my shield on the ground and my spear on top of it.

"I shall go," I said. "I will not die because the King has died."

They all looked at me as though there were a great distance between me and them, as though I were a bird flying or a fish swimming, that they could not touch. Most of them were my friends; but they looked at me, now, from far off. They had already put their hearts down into the ground and only their bodies were standing here, like carts before the oxen are spanned to them, waiting to be dead. But I was alive.

Enduggam said:

"You are one of my family, and now are you going to make us all ashamed? You have promised to serve the King."

I said:

"The King was an old man. It was time for him to die. But it is not my time yet. I am young. Why must I die because an old sick man is dead?"

Enduggam stood still, holding his club with both hands. Then he turned his face another way and spoke without looking at me.

"You are wicked," he said. "You are wicked."

I looked at the others. I held my hands out to them.

"Am I wicked?" I asked them. "Is it wicked to wish to live and have wives and sons and not go down into the House

of the Dark before I need? I am not afraid. I would fight a lion or a man. But I will not lie down and be killed when I can live. There are still women and meat and clean water, whether the King has gone or not. I can live fifty years yet."

None of them answered me. They stood in the sun, holding their spears and not moving. I became angry. I said:

"Zida, you are my friend. Do you want to be buried under the earth when you could be walking on it and eating and drinking? Come with me. You have time. You can lift your life up out of the grave and take it for yourself again."

"I am not your friend," Zida said.

"You are. You have been my friend since we have worn clothes. Live and come with me."

"I shall go with the King. That is more than being a man's friend or not his friend. That is what is in front of me."

"You are a fool."

"That is nothing. It is what is in front of us that we must do."

"You are a fool."

We were as strong against each other as two stones.

"I shall have my place in the Land of No Return. You heard what Enduggam said. I shall rest quietly and not have to eat mud and drink bad water there."

"Oh, gods," I said, "you do not eat or drink that here, in the sun."

"I shall die one day, and perhaps then my body would lie in a field and not be buried. Then I should have no rest. It is better to die now and enter the House of the Dark along with the King and be received honourably."

I felt heavy and powerless. It was as if a god had put his hand inside my chest and plucked my strength out, leaving an empty place there. There was nothing else for me to say. I stood and listened to Zida.

"You do not know what you are doing when you refuse to guard the King any more. He will remember you underground and you will not be happy. He will be calling you from underground. You will always hear him."

When Zida said that I began to unfasten my war-cape. I put it down by my shield, and then I put the axe and helmet with it. Those were the things I had had from the King. I was free of them now.

"I am going," I said. "I will not lie down and be killed."

I walked about the city until evening. I would have gone home, but I know my father would think as Enduggam thought and would say it was a disgrace for me not to die with the others, and I could not bear that. About evening I went into the Temple. The priests were going up to the shrine to burn incense. A young priest offered me water from the holy well, but I refused it. I went down the passage to the Court of the Grove where the women were coming out of their cells, braiding their hair and putting their beads round their necks. One of them called to me. I had a lump of silver as big as a man's thumb tied in the corner of my shawl. I gave it to her and she took me into a cell.

She was a tall woman. Her hair was braided on each side of her head and hung to her waist. She wore a crown of silver and cornelian flowers over it, and silver ear-rings like flowers in her ears. Her dress was blue wool. She gave me beer from a jar. Then I remembered how long it was since I had eaten, and I asked for food. She had a little cooked fish and bread and dates. I ate them all, she serving me. Her dress left her right breast bare, and when she came near me I could smell perfume. I crammed my belly, but inside me there was fear, and the food could not crowd it out. Fear was in me like a wheel turning over and over, and I felt as though there were no roof over my head. I was more afraid than

when we had been waiting for the King to die. When I had finished the food she washed my hands for me and said: "Do you wish me to dance for you?"

"No, do not dance."

The wheel was turning in me, going faster and faster. I was like a man with his back to a cave when he does not know what is inside it. I wanted to rest. I wanted the wheel to stop for to-night. I said:

"Can you make me sleep?"

She smiled at me with a bold mouth.

"Did you only come here for sleep, rich man?"

"But can you put what is inside me to sleep. Can you stop my thoughts?"

She stood up and put her hand to the clasp of her dress.

"Yes, I can do that."

The Temple became very quiet. Not many men had come into the Court of the Grove. My soul was like a bird flying into the sky, flying higher and higher, beating strong wing-beats. I was lifting and flying away. The wheel had stopped in me. There was nothing for me to fear, only life still there for me that I had kept back from the pit that Zida and Luenlil were going down into. She was my sky; was warm and safe. I drew the plaits of her hair round my neck. I said:

"My soul is a bird."

"Fly, bird. Sing."

I stayed with her till morning. Whilst I slept, she kept her hand on me, and whilst I was awake I drew her hair through my fingers and thought of the pit I had escaped. In the morning a priestess with a bony face like a man's came to the cell door. She looked hard at me and said:

"Who are you?"

"I am from the Great House."

"You are the soldier who would not go with the King."

"I would not go with him."

She held her hand up.

"You have defiled the Grove. There is no place here for you. You bring bad influences with you. The King will call after you from the Land of No Return and you will have bad luck. Everyone near you will have bad luck. Go away."

I said to the woman:

".I do not wish to bring bad luck on you. May all the bad luck I bring fall on this dog's daughter here. I will go to my father's house. If you come to see me there I will give you more silver."

"No," said the priestess, "you must not stay in the city."

"The priests cannot drive me out of my father's house."

"If the priests tell the citizens what bad luck you carry, they will burn your father's house and you in it."

"Then where shall I ever have peace?"

"You will never have it. But at least do no more harm in this place. Go far away."

I took a little silver and my axe and some food, and when the afternoon heat had dropped I went out by the gate the hyena had come in at. I did not look backward towards the city. By evening I had come to the river.

I slept that night under the wall of a goat-pen on the river bank. Sleeping on the ground, feeling the ground under me, I thought of the pit again and the men who would be strangled in it. Men like Zida, women like the woman in the Temple would have to sleep on earth, as I was sleeping, and under earth. I was nearer to them, lying like this on the ground, than in a bed. I thought I could hear the sound of people going underground to the House of the Dark. I slept very little.

In the morning some ferrymen came with rafts and I crossed the river, going westward. I thought I would find another

city where they would not know me. The river was very clear and happy in the first morning, with great clouds of birds rising up and flying about each other, keeping together like clouds of locusts, and light on the water and some fishermen singing:

"Oh, day of big pike and big carp,"

setting their nets. There were some huts on the far bank of the river, and I bought fresh food at one of them, breaking a small piece off a silver ingot with my axe to pay for it.

I was two days getting to the next city, and the fear began again. I remembered how Zida and the priestess had said the old King would call after me. I tried to think of the woman in the Temple, but then I remembered that the Temple had been built by the King. In a way, she belonged to him. The whole world belonged to him. I might go so far that I was unknown, but I could never go far enough for him to be unknown. He was the ruler.

At the city they took me before the magistrates to give an account of myself. I had tried to slip in through the gate when the guards were not looking, but they saw me and knew I was a stranger. The magistrates were sitting in the doorway of the city Temple: little provincial magistrates who would hardly have dared to cross the threshold of the Great House. Inside the Temple they were singing dirges for the King. I heard. I told the magistrates that I had run away because of enemies in my own city, and had committed no crime. I offered to swear this by the sun. But when I refused to give my name, one of them said:

"We cannot have you here. You are an unknown man, and the gods know what you have done or where you come from. In such unlucky times we cannot be too careful. You must go to-morrow."

I had never asked anyone to pity me before. I said:

"Have pity. I swear by the sun and my head that I am not a criminal."

"If you are here at sunset to-morrow you shall be branded."

They did not even look at me again. The next case was called and I was pushed out; but as I was going down the street a man stopped me.

"I know who you are," he said. "I heard rumours about you from the King's city. News travels fast."

I looked at him. "I wonder," I said, "that you are not afraid to speak to me."

He said:

"I am afraid. But I am sorry for you. When the last king died they made my brother go with him to the Land of No Return. That is why I did not tell the magistrates who you were. You have done a terrible thing. I do not see how you can ever prosper. But I am sending an ass-train with dates and sesame to a city in the far west, the last city in the world, to-morrow. Go with it. Perhaps they will not know you there."

So I became a caravan-man. I had been taught to think that these men were brothers to their own donkeys, but now I was one of them.

We went by the desert, about a dozen of us. All day, except at the hottest time, we plodded in the sand with cloths tied over our mouths. The sun was strong. It came down like blows of a war-club, and there was nothing else to see: only sharp light jumping up and down over soft yellow ground. We crossed dead tracks where the river had been once, and sometimes there would be burrows of the fat grey lizards with horny tails that can live without drinking. We were going westward, and it is underground in the west that the Land of No Return lies. The funeral would be over now.

Luenlil and Zida and the others would be lying outside the King's door with their spears. I used to think that I could hear the King calling me, saying my name sharply. It must have been the sound my feet made.

We had bad luck on the journey, the King's wish following me to the west. He was everywhere, because he had ruled everywhere. Two donkeys and a man died and we were short of water. The men talked to each other. One of them said:

"I heard a rumour in our city of a man coming from the King's city and bringing double bad luck with him. You would think he was with us now," and looked at me. That night I took him aside and showed him my axe. "You have heard some fine rumours," I said, "but if you tell what you have heard you will never hear or tell anything again."

It took forty-nine days to reach the city in the far west. It was like any other city, with a wall and a Temple, but there was nothing beyond it. We stabled our asses in the rest-house and ate meat and porridge and fresh fish, and drank beer. I washed my body all over and put oil on it. I thought: This is where I must stay all my life.

The merchant that we brought the goods to paid us in grain and silver. I sold my grain for more silver in the market and began to look round the city. The Temple belonged to Enki and Damgin, who are the kindest of the gods and who warned Ziudsudra to build the ark when the flood was coming. There was a well outside it where women and boys came for water. I stood and watched them. One of the women smiled at me, and I thought of the woman in the Temple in my own city. I smiled at her. But it was at that very moment that they found me out.

It was a great crowd of them, men with sticks, and shrill old women. They were shouting about the unlucky man, the

stranger who had brought double bad luck into their city. They pointed at me. It was the donkey-man who told them, I am sure. I held out my hands to them.

"Listen to me," I said. "I have come a long way. If I was ever unlucky I have left it behind me. Have pity."

One of them threw a broken pot. It cut my forehead. Then the woman who had smiled pointed at me and began to scream.

"Look! Look! Look! Unlucky! Unlucky! I can see the curse on his face."

They threw nothing else; but drew away from me on each side. Some covered their eyes. I ran with all my strength out of the city.

I understood then what had become of me, and I was afraid of nothing any more. This was how the King was calling me. Wherever I went his power would be beforehand and the people would drive me out. I should have no peace: but I must go west alone until I found the Land of No Return and the King and Zida and Luenlil waiting for me in the House of the Dark. It was not safe for men to talk to me or be with me. When I lay down that night I could hear again the movement underground of people crawling in the earth and talking, making their way underground to the west. I heard the King's voice very clearly. He told me all this.

I do not know how long I was going towards the west. Whenever I came to a well I would lie still some days for the sake of the water. It was green water and it smelt bad. The wells were far apart. If the talking underground, under where my head lay at night, had not helped me, I should never have found them. I ate unspeakable things, too, and I had no fuel or firedrill, so I ate them raw. It was the hot time, and at first the sand burned my feet until the skin was gone, but they hardened. When I shut my eyes it was difficult to open

them again. The lids stuck together. I think, perhaps, I was three months in the desert, because the weather cooled a little in the end. I had nothing to hurry for. The King was everywhere. He had ruled everywhere above the ground when he was alive. He ruled everywhere below it now. I could take which road I pleased and I should still be going towards him. I never heard any sound in the desert except his talking at night; and I knew I should not die before I found the place where he required me, because once, at a well, I saw a lion. It was thin and starved, but it did not charge me. I was reserved.

When the weather had been cool for a week, I thought I had found the entry to the Land of No Return, because there were men sitting at one of the wells, and the smoke of a fire. I came on them in the early dawn; had been walking since moonset: four men sitting with spears stuck in the ground near them and the smoke going up in a line. I lay down and watched them. Their bodies were bare, dark-coloured, and they sat still. I thought: These have been sent up to wait for me. This is the place. They will take me underground to the King here. I stood up and walked, but when I was nearer to them I saw that they were only an encampment of desert-people and were making ash-bread over their fire. They came to me.

I had not heard voices of living people for a long while. These savages spoke a language like ours, but thicker and longer, with long words.

"Who are you?"

It was like a pain of happiness to hear their voices: voices of live men speaking in daylight, for one last time. I was thankful to them. I would not bring bad luck on them. I said:

"Stand back from me. Do not come near. The King is

dead and I would not go with him. Now he is punishing me. Keep away."

They looked at me. Their eyes were still and sure. One of them said:

"Who is the King? We have never heard of him. But you are tired. We have got water and are making bread. Sit here and eat."

# Daughter

## Erskine Caldwell

At sunrise a negro on his way to the big house to feed the mules had taken the word to Colonel Henry Maxwell, and Colonel Henry 'phoned the sheriff. The sheriff had hustled Jim into town and locked him up in the jail, and then he went home and ate breakfast.

Jim walked around the empty cell-room while he was buttoning his shirt, and after that he sat down on the bunk and tied his shoe laces. Everything that morning had taken place so quickly that he even had not time to get a drink of water. He got up and went to the water bucket near the door, but the sheriff had forgotten to put water in it.

By that time there were several men standing in the jail yard. Jim went to the window and looked out when he heard them talking. Just then another automobile drove up, and six or seven men got out. Other men were coming towards the jail from both directions of the street.

"What was the trouble out at your place this morning, Jim?" somebody said.

Jim stuck his chin between the bars and looked at the faces in the crowd. He knew everyone there.

While he was trying to figure out how everybody in town had heard about his being there, somebody else spoke to him.

"It must have been an accident, wasn't it, Jim?"

A coloured boy hauling a load of cotton to the gin drove up the street. When the wagon got in front of the jail, the boy whipped up the mules with the ends of the reins and made them trot.

"I hate to see the State have a grudge against you, Jim," somebody said.

The sheriff came down the street swinging a tin dinner pail in his hand. He pushed through the crowd, unlocked the door, and set the pail inside.

Several men came up behind the sheriff and looked over his shoulder into the jail.

"Here's your breakfast my wife fixed up for you, Jim. You'd better eat a little, Jim boy."

Jim looked at the pail, at the sheriff, at the open jail door, and Jim shook his head.

"I don't feel hungry," he said. "Daughter's been hungry, though—awful hungry."

The sheriff backed out the door, his hand going to the handle of his pistol. He backed out so quickly that he stepped on the toes of the men behind him.

"Now, don't you get careless, Jim boy," he said. "Just sit and calm yourself."

He shut the door and locked it. After he had gone a few steps towards the street, he stopped and looked into the chamber of his pistol to make sure it had been loaded.

The crowd outside the window pressed in closer. Some of the men rapped on the bars until Jim came and looked out. When he saw them, he stuck his chin between the iron and gripped his hands around it.

"How come it to happen, Jim?" somebody asked. "It must have been an accident, wasn't it?"

Jim's long thin face looked as if it would come through the

bars. The sheriff came up to the window to see if everything was all right. "Now, just take it easy, Jim boy," he said.

The man who had asked Jim to tell what had happened, elbowed the sheriff out of the way. The other men crowded closer.

"How come, Jim?" he said. "Was it an accident?"

"No," Jim said, his fingers twisting about the bars. "I picked up my shotgun and done it."

The sheriff pushed towards the window again.

"Go on, Jim, and tell us what it's all about."

Jim's face squeezed between the bars until it looked as though only his ears kept his head from coming through.

"Daughter said she was hungry, and I just couldn't stand it no longer. I just couldn't stand to hear her say it."

"Don't get all excited now, Jim boy," the sheriff said, pushing forward one moment, and being elbowed away the next.

"She waked up in the middle of the night again and said she was hungry. I just couldn't stand to hear her say it."

Somebody pushed all the way through the crowd until he got to the window.

"Why, Jim, you could have come and asked me for something for her to eat, and you know I'd have given you all I got in the world."

The sheriff pushed forward once more.

"That wasn't the right thing to do," Jim said. "I've been working all year and I made enough for all of us to eat."

He stopped and looked down into the faces on the other side of the bars.

"I made enough working on shares, but they came and took it all away from me. I couldn't go around begging after I made enough to keep us. They just came and took it all off. Then Daughter woke up again this morning saying she was hungry, and I just couldn't stand it no longer."

"You'd better go and get on the bunk now, Jim boy," the sheriff said.

"It don't seem right that the little girl ought to be shot like that," somebody said.

"Daughter said she was hungry," Jim said. "She'd been saying that for all of the past month. Daughter'd wake up in the middle of the night and say it. I just couldn't stand it no longer."

"You ought to have sent her over to my house, Jim. Me and my wife could have fed her something, somehow. It don't look right to kill a little girl like her."

"I'd made enough for all of us," Jim said. "I just couldn't stand it no longer. Daughter'd been hungry all the past month."

"Take it easy, Jim boy," the sheriff said, trying to push forward.

The crowd swayed from side to side.

"And so you just picked up the gun this morning and shot her?" somebody asked.

"When she woke up this morning saying she was hungry, I just couldn't stand it."

The crowd pushed closer. Men were coming towards the jail from all directions, and those who were then arriving pushed forward to hear what Jim had to say.

"The State has got a grudge against you now, Jim," somebody said, "but somehow it don't seem right."

"I can't help it," Jim said. "Daughter woke up again this morning that way."

The jail yard, the street, and the vacant lot on the other side was filled with men and boys. All of them were pushing forward to hear Jim. Word had spread all over town by that time that Jim Carlisle had shot and killed his eight-year-old daughter, Clara.

"Who does Jim share-crop for?" somebody asked.

"Colonel Henry Maxwell," a man in the crowd said. "Colonel Henry has had Jim out there about nine or ten years."

"Henry Maxwell didn't have no business coming and taking all the shares. He's got plenty of his own. It ain't right for Henry Maxwell to come and take Jim's, too."

The sheriff was pushing forward once more.

"The State's got a grudge against Jim, now," somebody said. "Somehow it don't seem right, though."

The sheriff pushed his shoulder between the crowd of men and worked his way in closer.

A man shoved the sheriff away.

"Why did Henry Maxwell come and take your share of the crop, Jim?"

"He said I owed it to him because one of his mules died about a month ago."

The sheriff got in front of the barred window.

"You ought to go to the bunk now and rest some, Jim boy," he said. "Take off your shoes and stretch out, Jim boy." He was elbowed out of the way.

"You didn't kill the mule, did you, Jim?"

"The mule dropped dead in the barn," Jim said. "I wasn't nowhere around. It just dropped dead."

The crowd pushed harder. Then men in front were jammed against the jail, and the men behind were trying to get within earshot. Those in the middle were squeezed against each other so tightly they could not move in any direction. Everyone was talking louder.

Jim's face pressed between the bars and his hands gripped the iron until the knuckles were white.

The milling crowd was moving across the street to the vacant lot. Somebody was shouting. He climbed up on an automobile and began swearing at the top of his lungs.

A man in the middle of the crowd began pushing his way alone. Jim stood holding to the bars and looking through the window. The sheriff had his back to the crowd, and he was saying something to Jim. Jim did not hear what he said.

A man on his way to the gin with a load of cotton stopped to find out what the trouble was. He looked at the crowd in the vacant lot for a moment, and then he turned around and looked at Jim behind the bars. The shouting across the street was growing louder.

"What's the trouble, Jim?"

Somebody on the other side came to the wagon. He put his foot on a spoke in the wagon wheel and looked up at the man on the cotton while he talked.

"Daughter woke up this morning again saying she was hungry," Jim said.

The sheriff was the only person who heard him.

The man on the load of cotton jumped to the ground, tied the reins to the wagon wheel, and pushed through the crowd to the car where all the shouting and swearing was being done. After listening for a while, he came back to the street, called a negro who was standing with several other negroes on the corner, and handed him the reins. The negro drove off with the cotton towards the gin, and the man went back into the crowd.

Just then, the man who had driven off alone in his car came back. He sat for a moment under the steering wheel, and then he jumped to the ground. He opened the rear door and took out a crowbar that was as long as he was tall.

" Pry that jail door open and let Jim out," somebody said. " It ain't right for him to be in there."

The crowd in the vacant lot was moving again. The man who had been standing on top of the automobile jumped to the ground, and the men moved towards the street in the direction of the jail.

The first man to reach it jerked the six-foot crowbar out of the soft earth where it had been jabbed.

The sheriff backed off.

" Now, take it easy, Jim boy," he said.

He turned and started walking rapidly up the street towards his house.

# Men of God

## Monica Redlich

THREE clergymen were talking over their eleven o'clock cups of tea. Two of them, young men in overcoats, stood side by side on the hearthrug, completely hiding the fire. Their host sat facing them. He was an older man, grey-haired and round-shouldered, with curious overhanging brows.

The Reverend Brian Mannering's study was dark, with small windows. The walls were heavy with theological books and diocesan photographs. The carpet was red, rather threadbare, and the paint was chocolate brown. A steel engraving of the Lost Sheep over the mantelpiece gave the room, as it were, its text; but there were tokens of the broader outlook also—a coloured pipe-rack, and a golfing calendar with a comic picture upon it.

"Sugar, Gregory?"

"Thanks, Kathie gave me some."

Gregory Smithson rattled his spoon in his cup, and smiled broadly about him. He was young—barely thirty. He was one of the rising men of the diocese, for he had no brains, and consequently no problems deeper than his chances in the county tennis tournaments. He liked this room. It seemed to him sober and dignified, and not even Brian Mannering could have felt more strongly that it mirrored a personality.

His host did not answer. He went on trying to fill his pipe without upsetting his tea-cup, but absently, as if his mind were on higher things. The third man was not asked if he wanted sugar. He did, as a matter of fact; but he said nothing about it. He stood in his corner by the *Crockford's Directory*, dark-skinned, dark-haired, dark-eyed, rather ugly, almost lost against the background: and he drank his tea without sugar because Mrs. Mannering had given it to him.

Brian Mannering finished filling his pipe. For several seconds nobody spoke at all. Then Gregory Smithson drained his cup and put it down with a clatter.

"Billings is a fool," he remarked very cheerfully.

He glanced around for appreciation. Nobody answered.

"He's a fool to let her go on like that. Don't you think so, Walters?"

The dark man beside him put up a nervous hand. His fingernails were dirty. Before he could answer, however, Mr. Mannering took the scarcely-lit pipe from his mouth.

"He gave fifty pounds to the Quota, my boy. We ought to remember that his private life is no concern of ours."

Gregory saw this so quickly that he nodded almost at once: but there was a gleam in his little blue eyes.

"Still, I must say, I'm glad he's not *my* squire. I wish old Derrill joy of him, what? The way she's carryin' on—well, you'd hardly believe it, Mannering, and that's a fact."

"*No?*"

His host's eyes grew round, and bright, and serious with holy curiosity. It was clear that he wished to hear more, from the highest motives; but they both, just in time, remembered Walters, and there was rather an awkward silence. Luckily, in another moment they heard a voice in the hall, and almost immediately Kathie Mannering reappeared.

"Well, you three? Still talking shop?" She might have been

pretty, had she ventured to think about it. She was many years younger than her husband, and she still walked lightly.

" Well, no, my dear, no." Mr. Mannering's conscience would never have let him say that he was when he wasn't. One could see that in his face. " But we ought to have been, perhaps. We haven't quite settled about the meeting yet."

" I think, sir, I ought to go."

Three pairs of eyes turned towards the embarrassed speaker. Only one of them noticed that Walters's face was flushed. Kathie began to say something, then stopped abruptly. In a couple of seconds, before even good-byes had been properly said, the lanky figure had got itself out of the door, and they heard the click of the front-door latch and the noise of a starting car.

There was a moment's silence. Then Gregory moved.

" Queer chap, Walters."

Mr. Mannering shook his head.

" Unsteady, I'm afraid. Unsteady."

" Anglo-Catholic." Gregory turned to the mantelpiece, and helped himself to a cigarette. He was liked by his host, and he knew it.

Mr. Mannering brooded over his pipe for several moments. Naturally, nobody spoke.

" The more I think about All Saints'," he began, very slowly, " the more it distresses me."

Still nobody spoke. This was a serious matter, and only one person in Evertree Vicarage was qualified to talk about it. Of course it distressed him. They understood. Out of his parish—a Broad Church parish: a respectable parish—a slice had been taken and made into a High Church parish, with a tin church and a High Church priest; and the priest was Evan Walters.

" I don't mean from my own point of view—but I don't have to tell you that." Mr. Mannering looked up with a gentle certainty.

"I know. Sickenin'." Gregory shook his head sympathetically. Kathie said nothing at all. This disappointed her husband, and he gave her a glance of reproach. She was staring out of the window, drumming with her fingers on the sill.

"Mind you," said the Vicar of Evertree minus All Saints', "mind you, we've got to be broad-minded. There are people who like all that sort of thing—confession, and incense, and bowing and scraping, and so forth. There *are*. One admits it. Only—*only*—it's not what we want down here."

"No, no," said Gregory. "Quite. There's no need for it. And Walters is a bit of an ass. What you want—what you *want*—you want All Saints' put back into your parish, and everything to go on as it was before."

The Vicar raised his shoulders in depreciation.

"It's not what I *want*," he said sadly. "It's what's best for the people."

"Oh—of course. Of course. Of course it is."

"There *are* people——"

At the sound of the tense, quiet voice both men turned and stared. Kathie's face was white. Her hair had begun to fall down.

"There *are* people here who care for—for that sort of thing, as you call it."

"Who, my dear?" Her husband smiled gently. He knew this argument well.

"Well—the Bassetts."

"And who else?"

"The—the Dunns."

"And who else?" There was nobody else: he knew it.

"The—the—oh, I don't know all their names. But there are people, anyway—and if we're going to be broad-minded, why shouldn't everyone have the kind of church that they want?"

"That's my Kathie." The Vicar smiled even more gently.

"You always want to do good, my dear, don't you? But with your upbringing, you don't really understand all these matters yet. Besides—you have a *little* leaning that way yourself. You know you have! Do you know, Gregory——" He looked up, sharing with his young friend a quaint and rather touching joke —"Do you know, she once wanted to go to a service at All Saints' herself!"

"She—— What? Kathie did? Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha. Yes, really. Kathie did. Ha, ha, ha, ha."

The study rang with their happy merriment; the amusement of two men with (they hoped they might say) a sense of humour, over the fact that the wife of the Vicar of Evertree had wanted to go to church at All Saints'. They laughed so much that they did not hear the front door open and shut again. When their mirth died away, they heard instead a sound that puzzled them deeply. Someone was coming along the passage; but over and above the ordinary, rubber-soled footsteps, something was going *thud, thud, thud, thud,* in a soft but ominous procession.

"Who is it?"

Kathie was still looking out of the window. She answered her husband coldly.

"It's Mr. Derrill. I suppose he'll want some tea."

"Tea? Tea? Did you say tea, my dear?"

The door opened. Framed in the doorway stood a short, stout, bald-headed clergyman, holding a goose. The goose was enormous. Its head hung limply down on the floor, and as Digby Derrill stepped further into the room it went *thud, thud* on the skirting-boards.

"Here you are, my dear. Hullo, Brian. Hullo, Smithson. Here you are, then—take it. Something for your supper."

They eyed the bird in consternation; but Kathie took it, and managed to thank him, and dropped it heavily down in a corner

where she would not see it. She turned to the tea-tray. She was rather pale.

"Now," said Derrill when he was safely provided with tea. "What was all the noise about when I came in?"

Gregory chuckled.

"Kathie's got a passion for Spikey Walters," he told him, making room on the hearthrug. "Wants to go to Confession."

"Tcha," said Derrill, "you can't tell me. I know all about *that*."

"Eh?" The man in the chair looked up very suddenly. "Eh? What?"

Derrill was a man of the world. He had Billings for squire, and no less than three people in his parish who put paper money in the bag if they came to church at all. He took up a stance to suggest these things.

"*I* saw you, my dear, at our sale of work, carryin' on with the fellow. Now——"

"Wh——" said Brian Mannering. "Wh——" He glanced round him anxiously, and his eyes, blinking rapidly, sought the face of his wife. Wh——"

"Now *that* afternoon——" Men of the world are not interrupted by elderly vicars who stammer. Derrill re-planted his rubber-soled feet. "Now *that* afternoon just shows you, old fellow, the sort of chap poor Walters is. (Mind you, I'm sorry for him. I'm sorry for him.) It's his *manner*. He bought nothing —I should *say*, nothing—the whole afternoon; but I'm not the man to complain of a thing like that. If I went to his fête and bought I don't know how many pounds of jam from Lady Bassett—well, that's my way, and the other's his way; that's all. Beastly jam, too. But, my dear fellow, he was rude—he was *rude* to Mrs. Billings."

"He wasn't?" If Brian Mannering had had any other

worries, they were forgotten in this shocking occurrence. His eyes grew round.

"He was. My squire's wife. I ask you."

There was a short silence. Gregory was the first of them to recover.

"She's—er—I gather——"

His lips shot out. His eyebrows contracted, and his eyes gave the impression of squinting. There were certain things so indelicate that a Broad Churchman could naturally not refer to them.

In answer to this Derrill pulled his under-lip with his finger and thumb. He shook his head. Had he been in any other company, one might almost have said that he winked.

"Ask no questions, eh, Smithson! I can only say——" He thought for a moment what it was he could only say. "I can only say that I go up to dinner there at least once a week (they're delightful people), and I never see anything to which I feel called to take exception."

The Vicar of Evertree looked at his pipe. It was out. He looked for a match, which his wife provided, and began to relight it. He puffed slowly, and the faint red glow lit up eyes that were far above local gossip. Everyone could see he was going to say something important. Everyone waited. His wife stood beside him, watching him.

"What I'm worried about," he said in a deep, hushed voice, "is Walters."

"Walters?" Digby Derrill stood on his toes. "Why Walters?"

Mr. Mannering shook his head.

"He's the wrong man, my dear Digby, in the wrong place. It's been borne in upon me more and more, and now I feel that I can't in honesty keep silence. He's the wrong man in the wrong place. I think I shall write to the Bishop."

"Write to the Bishop, old boy? But why? I didn't mean all that about Kathie."

Mr. Mannering looked at his friend with pain and amazement. Jokes of that kind were in very bad taste, and Digby knew it: but the kind of society into which he went seemed sometimes to have made him insensitive. He shook his head, if possible even more sadly, and once more explained the position.

"There are places where a man like Walters would be very much appreciated. In a slum parish, for instance. But here—he makes bad feeling, upsets people, and all that six families, perhaps, out of over five thousand, shall be able to go to Confession. It's not right. It's not right. Yes, I shall write to the Bishop."

Derrill's mouth opened. He almost smiled.

"Oh, it's *that* old story, is it? But, my dear fellow, why didn't you say so? Of course—of course. You want All Saints' put back into your parish. And a very good thing too. Get rid of Walters, no more ill feeling, everyone as happy as sandpipers."

"Digby, Digby." Mr. Mannering managed to give him a kind but reproving smile. Digby was not what he used to be. He put things crudely.

"That's just what I think," said Gregory, stretching himself like a cock.

"There you are, Brian. We're all with you. Smithson's with you. I'm with you. Billings, I'm sure, would be with you, and after all he's done for the diocese. . . . Write to the Bishop, old fellow. I certainly should."

"If I really feel——" Mr. Mannering stretched out a hand and pulled his young wife down on to the arm of the chair beside him: but absently, as if the ties of a wife and home were as nothing compared with the call of his sacred duty.

" If I really feel that I speak for the neighbourhood as a whole, I shall say that, much as we respect Walters and the work he is trying to do, there is no place for him here, and no need for the separate church at all."

" In fact," said Gregory, thinking it out, " you mean he's the wrong man in the wrong place."

" Precisely, dear boy, precisely. The wrong man in the wrong place."

Derrill put his hands in his overcoat pockets.

" Well, that's that, then." He coughed. " And you know, old fellow, you don't do too badly if All Saints' comes back to the parish. It's a clear three hundred a year."

Brian Mannering pushed his wife away from him. He stood up; slowly, with difficulty, as if someone had struck him a blow, yet with all the dignity of twenty-five years as a priest. The room was so still that the cracking of his knee-joints sounded as loud as a pistol.

" Digby," he said, in a voice that would have enriched the funeral service. " Digby. Don't you know me yet? "

Digby Derrill met his eyes with difficulty. For a moment there was a very real danger that the man of the world might speak; might say, " Yes, by God I do," and laugh. But Derrill was also a priest.

" Brian, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It was only a joke."

" A joke? "

The other man towered over him, staring, his brows heavy with the attempt to understand injustice. Derrill backed a couple of steps, almost into the coal-box.

" I mean, I was only thinkin'."

" I can think for myself."

Then suddenly, as if by magic, the older man's rage had gone. He sat down again, and his face was clear. He was a man of God. He knew it.

" Oh, that's all right, that's all right, Digby. Forget it. I'm sorry, too. Forget it. Don't say any more."

He felt again for his young wife's hand. He wanted her beside him. When a man of principle is unjustly accused, what better support can he have than the woman who loves him?

But a strange thing happened. Kathie was not there. The door slammed suddenly, and they heard her footsteps running —not walking, but running—down the hall.

Mannering shook his head.

" There, you see, Digby? " His voice was sad in its triumph. " You see? You've upset poor Kathie."

# Style

## F. M. Dunn

I GIVE you this story for what it is worth. I am not ashamed of the part I played in it, and I am quite content to find myself where I am at present. But I know that there are many people who will condemn me, and say it is just the sort of thing that anyone would expect from a low-bred fellow like myself. The man whom I injured called me a filthy Dago to my face. Certainly the Levantine had his share in my ancestry, but so, possibly, did the Celt, the Slav, and the Jew, to say nothing of a dozen others. When I look at my dark features in the mirror, I sometimes indulge in foolish imaginings. Perhaps a Spanish grandee and a Georgian princess might have compounded to make a part of me. I am happy these days, and such pleasant fancies naturally bubble up, but I do not really believe in them. I know that in reality I am the scum of many gutters, and that the story I am about to relate will, with many of you, put me outside the pale altogether.

Mona never liked me to call myself a publican, nor even an inn-keeper. I was the manager of a residential hotel, and she resented the fact that the inland revenue people insisted that my name should be written up outside the front door, even in the smallest possible letters. "Victor Geldard, licensed to sell Beer, Spirits, and Tobacco." She did not like to think that our

establishment had anything in common with any dirty little pub that bore a very similar inscription. But for my part I was well aware that the people who require those three commodities are not really as vastly different from one another as one might imagine. Beer, Spirits, and Tobacco! These three draw together units that might otherwise be poles apart.

Mona chose my plus-fours for me and my golf-jackets. I never liked plus-fours, and I never played golf, but she insisted that I should play mine host in the good old English sense, and be all things to all men. As most of the people who came to stay at "The Lion's Paw" were week-end golfers, this rig she chose for me seemed fairly safe. Mona was also a great admirer of the Prince of Wales, and she used to do her best to make me adopt the latest style that he happened to be patronizing at the moment. Sometimes I gave in to this dictatorship in the matter of pullovers, ties, and socks, but sometimes, I'm afraid, my original nonentity asserted itself. For instance, I have never worn a boater.

It was entirely to my wife, Mona, that I owed my position. She had worked as private secretary in a firm of brewers, and she happened to hear that her people had taken over a big country house, and were turning it into a first-class establishment that sought to catch the week-end traffic. It was to be up-to-date in every respect. Its charges were to be fairly high so as to exclude the undesirables. It was to be fully licensed.

I was fortunate enough to obtain the position of manager. Indeed I do not think that Mona would ever have married me if it had not been that she saw this chance for me, and made me apply for the job. I had excellent references, but I think they thought I was rather young. However, I got it, and it may have been that Mona exercised her charm on my behalf. She was always a most charming person and wonderfully capable.

The place scared me from the beginning. I am not speaking

of the work. That I could manage as well as anybody. Few people realize how easy it is to run an hotel, provided one has a practical business head and a certain amount of imagination. By imagination, I mean, in this instance, a real interest in one's clients, a power to sum them up, their wants and their possible idiosyncrasies. I had been a waiter, and I prided myself that I knew a fair amount about human nature. I was never educated, and I never had the kind of superior tastes that Mona had, but I could generally tell within the first ten minutes whether a man had brought his own wife or somebody else's to dine. Similarly, I always knew when people signed the register the particular kind of week-end that they had come for—quiet, noisy, sporting, adulterous. I knew things about luggage and types of cars that gave me an insight into the characters of my guests. I like people, and I am exhilarated by a crowd of people that are out to enjoy themselves. As I move among them as their servant I feel a sense of power that makes me able to please. And when they are contented, I am glad. I have fulfilled my function. Lastly, I was very nearly a gentleman. I believe the brewers had considered an ex-naval officer for the job, and I always think that they were largely influenced by the fact that my manners were as good as his, while at the same time, I had the inestimable advantage of having been a waiter. I have served people all my life, and I know that it is a service not to be too servile. Yes, I could do the work all right.

Mona was a wonderful help. She managed the staff admirably. She always engaged the right servants. Her chambermaids were perfect, efficient and good-looking and she kept them up to the mark. She was in charge of all the linen, china, and silver, and very wonderfully she managed. I admire to this day the beautiful taste she showed. She had coloured sheets and blankets on some of the beds with every-

thing to match. The morning tea-services were of a futuristic sort of pattern, specially made at some pottery works. The glass came from Sweden in a big consignment. The proprietors were lavish in their expenditure and we got everything we asked for. I remember our card room; it was all glass and chromium and stainless steel, in wonderful tubular effects. My wife and one of the directors planned it. The whole place had to be tip-top. We had to get a name for something, even if it was only for eccentricity. For my own part, I have no eye for interior decoration, but I could see that it was well done, and it was the acme of comfort as well. There was an electric fire and hot and cold water in every room, and the beds were marvellously sprung. Everywhere there was luxury—not a mere opulence, mind you, but that elegant, subdued luxury for which one pays the highest price. And I was the manager of this palace. I was not allowed to think of myself as a publican, and somehow I was expected to look like a disinherited duke. Is it any wonder that I sometimes went and looked at the little notice above the front door. "Victor Geldard, licensed to sell Beer, Spirits, and Tobacco"?

I cannot help it, I did not like my job, though I realize that I was lucky to get it. It was a rise in the world, but yet I disliked it. I was scared. I was only thirty-two when I took it over, but I had spent a long time watching over men and women, and I felt that underneath all this luxury there might be something sinister for them. But Mona was in it heart and soul, and I know she blamed me for what she felt to be my lack of enthusiasm. But I was not a sportsman. I wanted my guests to be happy, and I tried to make them so. Often I was worried because when they arrived their faces were careworn and troubled, and frankly, I did not think they wanted to be slapped on the back by mine host. What were my tweeds and my public school manners worth to them? I wanted to get

back into my old black suit, and bring them a nice mixed grill or the breast of a chicken with pêche melba to follow, and what they fancied from the wine list. Do you understand me? I have been trained to serve people with my hands and feet and brisk body. I cannot help it. People like me are born to be walked over. I simply cannot stand at my castle gate and welcome the stranger loftily; the stranger may be sick or sad, and it is I that am his menial. Mona never saw it like that. She was always hinting that I was longing to go back to the gutter where I belonged, and from whence she had plucked me out. Perhaps I was, but then as I have already said, my origins are obscure and unsatisfactory.

In those days I often thought of Gustave Kesterman. He came and had lunch with me one day. Think of it! I entertained Gustave Kesterman to lunch, I, who had been a waiter in his restaurant. Mona, when she heard that he was coming, kept impressing upon me my own worth.

"Remember, you're as good as Mr. Kesterman, these days, Victor," she said. "Don't you go licking his boots. You're his equal now, not his employee. He can't give you the sack."

I heard all she said, but had not Gustave Kesterman given me three good meals a day, and work, when I was scarcely higher than this table? I ought to have been at school, you say. Yes, but my father lied about my age to the inspectors, and instead of wasting my time in the fifth standard, I learnt other things that have been more important to me from this self-made Jew. And now I was going to have the honour of entertaining him to lunch in my own hotel. I think of him always as my benefactor; he was a father to me, and to-day I have reason to be doubly grateful. "Lick his boots," Mona had said. I am not partly Latin for nothing, and since then, I have taken that man's hand and kissed it, and wept tears of gratitude over it.

I did not wear my plus fours when he came. I have a rooted prejudice against these ungainly garments, and I did not want to appear the complete ass before him. I wore a dark brown lounge suit, faultlessly cut. My figure does justice to a good tailor. With it I wore a fine blue shirt, gold cuff links, and just the right tie and handkerchief.

I knew beforehand how he would appear. I see his rotund stomach now, with the gold watch-chain laid across it. He was not very tall, yet neither was he very much below the average. He had a big head that gave him a slightly top-heavy appearance. His face was broad and smiling, his dark brown eyes wide open under arching brows. I have never seen him in more than one kind of suit. I presume he had them all made alike. They were always of black cloth with a faint grey line. He wore a stiff collar and a white shirt with a black pin-stripe in it. He had a heavy gold signet on the little finger of his left hand. There were generally a few little grease spots on his waistcoat, and on that day when he came to lunch with me I noticed that the edges of his cuffs were frayed and slightly grubby looking. Yet I worshipped this man; for nearly twenty years he had been the sun, moon, and stars to me, and now that I am fifty years old—no longer a young man—I do not consider that there was anything unworthy in that worship. Alas, he died a year since.

After we had eaten I showed him round the hotel. He was delighted with everything: in his old-fashioned, shiny black boots, he trod into the deep pile of the carpets: with his plump hand, he felt the quality of the upholstery on the great arm-chairs. He was particularly enchanted with a light concealed in an alabaster sheath, which illumined one of the landings. It was a cunning piece of workmanship, and he stopped before it quite a long time, turning the switch on and off. No doubt he thought of all the crystal chandeliers in his

own place, and was comparing with them this subtle handling of the problem. He praised my wife's share in it all, and paid her little compliments which I know pleased her. I gave him an expensive cigar and sat down to listen to his comments.

"It's magnificent," he said, "perfectly magnificent. Such style!"

"What about my chef?" I asked him.

"Good," he said, "quite good enough. I thought perhaps there might have been a trifle more seasoning in that sauce, but that's nothing. It's the kind of cooking you want in a place like this, nothing foreign but everything of the best plain English. It's a good show, Victor, a very good show."

Time and again he remarked on what he called the style of the place. I knew what he meant; the kind of thing that pleased Mona, the polish, the extreme high finish. At first I thought that this was a new side to his character. Everything was so different from his own that I did not think he would care for it, but afterwards I realized that it was all part of his genius. He was one of these rare people who know style when they see it, and praise it accordingly, even though it may differ from their own style. It was something that he reverenced, the perfect materialization of a dream.

When he departed, Mona was highly elated. "Your precious Mr. Kesterman didn't seem to find much wrong with the place," she challenged, as though defying *me* to find anything wrong.

"Neither do I," I retorted. "You don't understand, Mona. I always think of this hotel as a magnificent piece of high-powered machinery. I am only a little afraid sometimes that perhaps someone might get their fingers trapped in it, and I should feel responsible."

She merely laughed at me.

My father died just before my thirteenth birthday; I have no memory of my mother, nor of any other relative. Ever since I can remember, my father and I had lived together in one barely furnished attic in the big seaport of Broadpool. He worked by night. I did not then know the nature of this work, but at the time of his death I understood from the doctor that it was this particular thing which had accelerated the tuberculosis from which he died. He was a washer-up in a huge hotel with an all-night restaurant attached. From seven at night until six in the morning he was working in great steaming sculleries, in underground basements. All night long while I was sleeping, he was washing and wiping plates, and clearing away the remnants of marvellously prepared dishes. With his arms plunged in greasy water, he had inhaled for hours a steaming, fœtid atmosphere; then at dawn, he had crept up into the light of day, out into the raw grey morning air.

Was it any wonder that his lungs rebelled? He had never been a very strong man, and this last kind of toil killed him. Perhaps the soul in his body felt that it had reached the very lowest depths of degradation in perpetually witnessing this depressing spectacle of dirty dishes. Would not a man so employed come to hate the body's daily round of absorption and excretion with its perpetual gastronomical demands? Yet he did this revolting work to keep a roof over our heads and to provide me with nourishing food, and a good overcoat in which to go to school on the foggy winter mornings.

I can see my father quite clearly in my mind's eye. He was a smaller man than I am now, with a pointed white face and hollow cheeks. His forehead was low, and his straight black hair nearly touched his eyes. His body was extremely thin and ill-developed. When I think of him, I think of something inexpressibly sad, a sort of shell with the vitality gradually

draining away from it. He taught me his one accomplishment, to play the fiddle; but when he himself played, it was not the sad music that one would expect from such a being, but gay sophisticated tunes, little things that suggested a brittle gaiety, and a life of comfort and ease. Was not the gaiety of the French court at Versailles before the revolution, built over the bodies of such men as my father? One wonders how much of the sound of it came down to the subterranean depths.

During the winter of my thirteenth year, my father's cough became much worse. One morning, he told me that I was not going to school any longer, but I was going somewhere with him. I was to wash as much of myself as I could reach and put on my best clothes. He himself produced a decent felt hat, which he brushed and put on, and over his shabby suit he put a well-cut raincoat which someone had given him.

"You're fourteen now, boy," he said. "Don't forget. We've got to square those inspectors."

I did what he told me and together we walked out of the building into the street. That day marked my first acquaintance with Gustave Kesterman.

The Elite Café and Restaurant was in one of the second-class streets of Broadpool. It was a palatial building resplendent with elaborate sign-boards. A broad flight of imposing-looking steps ran up to the swing doors by which one entered. One found oneself in a marble-flagged entrance hall. Palm trees in bronze flower-pots stood in the corners. A long setee upholstered in crimson plush leant against one wall, placed there to accommodate those clients to whom the place was a rendezvous. Directly in front of the main entrance, inside, were two Corinthian pillars painted white and gold, and between them swung a tassellated curtain of electric blue. The cash desk and Ladies' and Gents' Cloaks were on the left. If one penetrated farther through the curtain one found oneself

in a hall of tremendous size. Tables were scattered everywhere, except in a small central space which was reserved as a dance floor. At the far end there was a small platform for the orchestra. Pillars that were also painted white and gold made an aisle down the centre and supported the plastered ceiling, where cupids hung festoons round the necks of recumbant gods and godesses. From this ceiling hung those crystal chandeliers of which I have already spoken.

This was the place of which Gustave Kesterman was the proprietor, and from which he was amassing a small fortune. It was one of those places to which people went in order to enjoy themselves, and not in order to show other people that they could afford to go there. The cuisine was excellent in a highly-spiced, lavish way. It was not the sort of place where one was expected to peck at one's food, but a man would take a girl to the Elite after they had both done a good day's work. Of course they both liked to pretend that they had done nothing of the sort, particularly the girl, but I know from the way they cleaned the plates up, that they had good healthy appetites. The orchestra was the best in the town; that was a well-known fact. It was out to make you dance; it had snap. Envious competitors vented their spleen by saying that it played lascivious tunes, but that was the kind of remark Kesterman was wise enough to ignore. "To the pure, all things are pure," he quoted, folding his plump hands, and with a satisfied smile on his good-humoured face he watched the dancers as they took the floor couple by couple.

A strong Hebrew element patronized it. Broadpool was swarming with Jews, and the Elite was a happy hunting ground of the younger generation. For that reason, it was not frequented by the best people, but ship's officers drifted here in search of a little pleasure, and typists and shop-girls, who dragged the latest fashion by the hair of the head till it lost

all semblance of distinction. When Esther Levy from Dot and Dash's wears a certain fashion at a café like the Elite it passes into limbo as far as Lady Vere de Vere is concerned. No, we did not make a mode famous at the Elite. We guillotined it, but we did it quite charmingly.

But I must return to that day when I set out with my father to find our way to this same café. He asked the commissionaire to take his name to Mr. Kesterman. It was not a busy time of day and we did not have to wait long. He himself appeared out of an adjacent door and came forward to my father with a smile of pleasure on his face.

"Toni!" he exclaimed. "This is a surprise! Come along with me." He led us into his office and made us sit down in two big leather arm-chairs. I remember my feet dangling several inches from the ground.

"But why haven't we met before?" he said. "How long have you been here?"

"Just a little time," said my father evasively. At that moment a fit of coughing took him, and I saw Kesterman look at him sharply.

"Is this your boy?" he asked.

"Yes," said my father. "Victor, this is Mr. Kesterman, a very old friend of mine." He shook hands with me solemnly. I was shy and tongue-tied and was glad when they continued their conversation.

"And do you still play the fiddle, Toni?" said Kesterman.

"Sometimes."

"You've taught him to play?" He indicated me with his thumb.

"As well as I could. I don't play for a living nowadays."

"No? What do you do, then?"

"I work at Flavelli's."

"So?" He asked my father no more questions. Perhaps it

occurred to him that they would not be welcomed. I imagine that they had known each other in days before my father had had to do such menial work, and before Kesterman had climbed to where he was at present. My father was proud, and it was not for his own sake that he had renewed the acquaintance, but for mine. I believe, too, that he had once done Kesterman a great service, a fact which he was loth to presume upon. When I look back, I realize that this present action pivoted entirely upon myself. He realized that his time was short and he wanted to get me settled in life before he died.

But Kesterman was always one for nosing out a delicate situation. He saw where one wanted to go, and then led one there unobtrusively. He tucked his thumbs in the arms of his waistcoat.

" There's always a job for you in my orchestra, Toni," he said. My father smiled; the situation had been eased for him.

" My fiddling days are over, Gustave," he replied. " But if you could do anything with Victor, here? "

" He's a bit small for the big drum, I'm afraid," said Kesterman, smiling at me.

" Oh! No. Nothing of that sort," said my father. " It was to be a waiter I was thinking of for him. He'd want training. Of course he'd be no good yet, but he's a good boy. Is there anything you could give a boy to do, Gustave? Anything that is, upstairs. I don't want him a scullion." Did he fear for me his own fate?

Kesterman swivelled round on his office chair, and looked me full in the face.

" Well, boy," he said, not unkindly, " what can you do? "

" I can run errands," I replied promptly. " And I can count change correctly. I do all our shopping, and I take things back if they're not good." Kesterman laughed. " And what salary do you want for these extensive accomplishments? "

Here my father broke in.

" Nothing, at first, Gustave, just what food he eats, and train him up. When he's a man and is worth it, he can have a man's wages. I'm only asking you to give him a bit of a start. I know he'll be all right with you."

" He shall have half a crown a week at first," said Kesterman, " and his name shall go down in the wage book just as though he were already a man."

And that is how I came to be employed at the Café Elite. I ran countless errands; I fetched change; I carried the wine up; I saw that there was always enough resin on the dance floor. I even ran out and purchased a new G string for the first violin when it snapped in the middle of the afternoon. And over all was the watchful and benign glance of Gustave Kesterman. I never expected him to pay much attention to my small self, but he did. He noticed how I was getting on, and saw to it that I got a chance to prove myself. As I became older, I took my share at the tables. I learnt how to serve, and how to be dexterous with difficult things like spoons and potatoes. I balanced trays on my five splayed fingers, and interpreted the French menu for the sons and daughters of Israel. For nearly twenty years I stayed there, and in time I earned the full wages of a man. After my father's death Kesterman was especially kind to me. He found me more suitable lodgings. He gave me clothes, and often he and his wife received me in their home. His sons treated me as their equal, and introduced me to others; thus I found congenial society when my work was over, an absolute necessity for any young person. More than that, I had glimpses into culture and refinement that helped to make me into what I have already quoted of myself, " very nearly a gentleman ". But I must never forget that I am not quite one. I am outside the world that calls itself honourable.

When I was nearly thirty, I met Mona. She often came in to dine with a fair-haired youth, whom she treated in a very off-handed manner. They always came to my table, and I looked forward to waiting upon this splendid creature, with her mass of black hair, her bright blue eyes, and her cheeks where the roses grew. She talked and laughed and seemed so certain of herself. I had never seen anyone who seemed so superbly disdainful; and to me it seemed right that she should be. That little fair-haired runt was not worthy of her.

She looked round her and appraised us all, and finally it pleased her to pay particular attention to myself. She threw an odd remark or so to me while I waited on them, and questioned me about my work, in a coolly interested manner. I felt a little flattered, but I thought it was just her vivacious way, and that she would do the same to anyone who happened to be there. Yet once or twice, when I brought her cloak, she gave me a glance that seemed to say, " This is for you, and you alone." I dared to allow myself to fall madly in love with her, and she knew it and encouraged me.

One day, when her fiancé—I suppose he was her fiancé—had gone to pay the bill at the desk, she asked me if I would like to take her out somewhere one Sunday. Would I not! Would a poor mortal like to elope with a goddess? We neither of us thought any more about the fair-haired young man who had paid for so many of her dinners.

She started to make me after her own desire. She wanted me to be ambitious, to get on in the world, and I lapped it all up. I began to think that I really was cut out to be something better than a waiter in what she called a " rotten little Jew-boy café ". Finally, she fired me to go after this job in connexion with Caller and Bride's brewery, and as you know, I got it. And that brings us back to where we started from. For four years, I had been manager of " The Lion's Paw ", in one of

the loveliest rural districts of England, on a main road, forty miles from London. We had no children.

One day, I received a wire to reserve a double room for three nights in the name of Bowen. I put the order through, and told the reception clerk.

As it happened I was in the hall when the people arrived, and heard the man give the name. He was a fellow of about my own age, perhaps a little younger. He was one of these sporting gentlemen, in a check overcoat and cap, which latter was pulled well down over one eye. He had a small black moustache and a sleek well-fed look. His thick tweed stockings had red tabs to them, and he wore a pair of big brown shoes, well-creased across the toes. His speech was refined, though the actual tone struck a little offensively on my ears. I was not very favourably impressed by him, though naturally, I put these feelings in the background. His wife was a little thing almost lost in a big fur coat, new and obviously expensive. She clung to his arm and said something to him, and as soon as she spoke, I knew she was of a different social class.

"She's frightened, but she's braving it out." Like a flash, the word's came into my head, though I had no justification for them. The porter carried the suit-cases upstairs, and they strolled into the lounge. He rang the bell. It was the middle of the afternoon and the waiter was off, so I attended to them myself. He wanted a small sherry for his wife, and a double whisky for himself and a baby Schweplet. I brought them, and again I was instantly aware that the girl—she looked about twenty—was quite unused to drinking sherry at three o'clock in the afternoon. Her wedding ring was new, and beside it was a fine diamond. As I came out again into the hall, I heard the reception clerk say something about "honeymoon couple" to the hall porter. There is little that escapes the

trained eyes of an hotel staff. I wondered how far my own surmises were correct. I had not to wait long.

It was the middle of the week and the hotel was not very full. There were only about five other parties besides the Bowens. The latter did themselves well at dinner, or rather *he* did. He pressed her to food and drink, and she sparkled a little, but not as much as she ought to have done. The dress she wore was too elaborate; she was not up to *grande toilette* that evening. I was puzzled, and again this odd sense of apprehension crept into my mind. Again, there was the image of a machine, gleaming in all its parts, the beautiful wheels whirring round, and human fingers twining through it all, checking the pace, accelerating it. Supposing the brain failed, and the power that ought to have been in control fell limp, what chance would those fingers have among all that steel?

Just after half-past nine that evening, I came through the lounge. I noticed the man Bowen at once. He was talking loudly to another guest, a dry-looking little Scotsman who often came " to get a bit of golf," as he said. I rather think it was in order to consume as much whisky as he liked out of sight of his family—not that I had ever seen him drunk, but he was one of these quiet people who can put away a great deal. Bowen was drinking brandy. The waiter had just brought him a large one, and he was fumbling over the change. His voice was thick, and his movements uncertain. Without any doubt, he was well on the way to being rotten drunk, and it was not the first time either. The girl was nowhere to be seen. I had not cared for the man's appearance when he was sober, and I liked it still less at the present moment.

I have never held a brief for gentleman-drunks. Possibly this is prejudice on my part, and I quite realize that a gentle-

man has as much right to bowl himself out with strong liquor as a navvy, but when I hear of a Member of Parliament being picked up dead drunk out of the gutter I know perfectly well that the mud which sweeps down that gutter is no different from that which would soil my own unworthy head if I were to find myself there. Quite frankly, I am not one of those who believe that Vine Street harbours the salt of the earth. But it was none of my business. I passed through, and was just going to my own quarters, when I remembered that there was a chair that wanted mending in the drawing-room, and I thought I would just slip in and have a look at it. The room was not usually occupied at this hour.

When I got in, I saw that there was somebody there. Mrs. Bowen was sitting huddled up on the sofa at the far end, and she was most certainly crying. I thought of beating a hasty retreat, when she looked up and saw me. She made no attempt to hide her tears and just sat there staring at me. Of course I ought to have left the room immediately and pretended not to see, but I could not do it. I had to walk up to her; something forced me to do so. There was no one else in the room. I stood for a second with my hand on the sofa and then I spoke. "Is there anything I can do for you?" I said. Of course I knew what the trouble was; he was drinking like a fish and she hated it.

"Oh! no thank you," she said, but she still sat there in an attitude that seemed to belie her words. I still had the feeling that there was something I could do for her, though I did not know what it was.

"You're in some trouble?" I said gently.

"Oh! yes," she muttered, "it's frightful, frightful." I understood perfectly; I still had no idea how to help, but I felt that I would have to be bold.

"Is it your husband?" I inquired with sudden daring.

"You don't like the way he's drinking?"

Relief spread over her face.

"How did you know?" she said.

"I saw him in the lounge just now."

"It's beastly. I hate it. We've only been married two days. I knew he did a bit, but I never thought he would be like this, not with me."

I never can make up my mind which are the biggest fools, men or women, but on the whole I think women are. At any rate, they have the greatest cheek. They storm their heaven with such frightful audacity. God and His angels cannot let them get away with it, so they fall, fall, fall, right into their hell of despair. What could I do? The man was rotten. I would never dare to judge another human being, not knowing his temptations, but there are certain facts that anyone who has any knowledge of the world cannot shut his eyes to. One was that that man could not make any woman on this earth even passably happy, and anyway there's no such thing as passable happiness. This of itself is always *in excelsis*. But that is neither here nor there. To live with him would mean plain suffering for any woman. It would mean the kind of pain that would actually twist her physical body. The five senses have nerves that react in the obscurest corners, and there would be times when she would thank God to pluck out almost any one of those five senses, if only to rid her of the sheer physical pain of possessing it. When I was seven, I saw a run-away horse in a butcher's cart dash into a tram standard. The man was thrown out and his skull was cracked open on the pavement. At the same time all the pieces of meat in the cart were scattered all over the road. It added ten-fold to the horror of the scene. In bed at night, I tried to blot the vision from my mind. "Oh! God! don't let me see the bits of meat," I prayed. It was a dreadful accident, but

if only I did not see it it would not be so bad; just as bad for the poor man, perhaps, but not so bad for me. That was what came into my head then. If only she need not see him drunk. It is the body that is indignant, not the soul. That forgives for ever. Body and soul! I am not a physician to worry out the relationship between the two, but I have the instinct to fling my body down for the service of other bodies. I am a waiter, a common servant. That, believe me, was what gave me the wits to do what I did do. But I played for time first.

"Take my advice," I said, "and go home. Leave him right away. It'll be easiest in the long run."

"I have no home," she replied. "I've earned my living for four years. My father and mother are both dead."

"But you surely have some relatives who would take care of you just while you get over this mistake?" She shook her head.

"I've aunts, but they wouldn't be any good." I tried to cull my brain for some other item of advice, but it refused to work. Do we not all hope against hope that our good advice will be accepted instead of ourselves? We flinch from taking the fatal step that hurls us beyond the boundaries of sane behaviour. Yet we are dragged willy-nilly. "Waiter!" "Waiter!" "Waiter!" "Coming, sir. Coming." A dozen things they ask of us besides their dinner. They ask what time the Palladium opens, and the time of the last boat over the ferry, and the way to the greyhound stadium, and the whereabouts of a decent pawnbroker, and where a fellow could buy a good ring for a girl. They ask us every question on earth except the way to heaven. Sometimes they borrow a pound note on the quiet, and if we like their looks we lend it, if we don't we haven't got one on us. But I was now the manager of a very stylish residential hotel. In my way, I was

a little god-almighty, and there was no need for me to do any dirty work. But I was beaten; it was not my job.

"Would you leave him if you had somewhere to go?" I asked her.

"Yes, I would, to-night," she said firmly, and she meant it. That finished it for me. I made up my mind that I would blot that man out of her eyes for ever. With my own body I would do it. I perched myself on the arm of the sofa; I felt happy now, as though something had clicked into position.

"Would you trust me to get you out of this?" I asked her.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"If you'll trust me, I'll take you away somewhere."

"Take me away!"

"Yes. Right now. But you'll have to live with me. You'll have to pretend to be my wife. Just pretend to other people, that's all. You needn't be afraid of me." She gave me a scared look that changed into one of complete gratitude. I believe she was so strung up that night that she was acting like one possessed. So was I for that matter.

"You're Mr. Geldard, aren't you, manager of this hotel?"

"Yes."

"And you'd take me away?"

"Yes."

"I'll come."

"All right," I said, getting up. "You're husband is drinking brandy in the lounge, and will probably continue to do so for another hour. He has a companion whom I happen to know is not yet nearly full. Go and get a suit-case with what you want in it for the night, and go out to the garage. You know the way. It's quite close; no one will be there. There's a blue Morris Oxford coupé just inside on the left. You can't mistake it. Go in and wait. I'll meet you there in twenty minutes' time."

Mona was playing bridge with some of our guests in the card-room. She wouldn't stir till at least eleven. I went along to our quarters and crammed a few personal possessions that I valued into a big suit-case. I left a note for Mona. I forget what I put in it.

I went to my roll-top desk and saw that all my papers were in order. My keys were the problem. There was a lot of money in the safe and other valuables. In the end I solved it by leaving them on Mona's pillow, just under her night-dress! I changed my clothes, put on an overcoat and a felt hat, and in fifteen minutes' time exactly, I was in the garage. Luckily no one saw me carrying the case, but I should have made some excuse. It was all extremely simple, and everything went without a hitch. Perhaps that was due to us not having made any elaborate plans. I switched the engine on, and the lights, and drove out on to the road. I headed for London. Half-way there, I turned north, and in the moonlight, we sped along the Roman road that would eventually bring us to Broadpool.

"What's your name?" I asked after we had gone a few miles.

"Phyllis Bowen," she replied. "What is yours?"

"Victor Geldard," I said, "licensed to sell beer, spirits, and tobacco." And that was exactly how I cleared out of my own hotel with another man's wife.

Phyllis was well tucked up in the passenger seat, and I suggested she should try to go to sleep. We had nearly three hundred miles to cover, and I took it easily. She seemed drowsy and half-stupified, and I think she did sleep a little. She had probably been living at terrific tension ever since her wedding day, and now with the snapping of her resistance her body relaxed. She had lived two years in those two days, and the speed had made her dizzy. She had been whirling

like a top and now it was just coming to a standstill. Just as dawn was breaking we stopped at a garage on the Great North Road, and when I had filled the car up with petrol I managed to get Phyllis a cup of tea, for which she was very grateful. It was nasty strong stuff, but I dare say it did her good. Soon after eight, we drove into Broadpool itself. I went straight to a quiet hotel I knew, and ordered some breakfast for Phyllis. I left her eating it; she wanted me to stay, but I wanted to get things fixed up right away, and I told her I would be back in an hour.

I went straight to the Elite. I knew I should find Kesterman there, for he was always early, and I made a clean breast of the whole affair to him. I told him all the facts and a great deal more that was just babbling on my part, but he was very patient. I suppose I was strung up too, and I had been driving all night.

"You'd chuck up that fine place?" he said. "Well, well. I hope the girl's in love with you."

"In love with me?" I echoed. "No, of course she isn't. I'm not in love with her, either." I was a little bit irritated that the thought should have occurred to anyone of his perspicuity. If I had been in love with her, should I have done it, a guest in my own hotel? I would never have dared.

Kesterman raised his eyebrows even higher than usual.

"My dear Victor," he said. "I always supposed you were a man of the world. For what then do you take her away? Chivalry? Pah! She is a woman, and if she is truly grateful at being delivered from this monster she will naturally wish to show her gratitude."

He was making me feel silly and youthful. Was there no such thing as delicacy of feeling? He saw what I was thinking, and smiled.

"All right, Victor, you think me a coarse-minded son of

the Ghetto, eh? No, don't deny it. But when you've finished with your lardy-dah notions, remember it's one of the duties of man to increase and multiply—one of the few that fortunately coincides with his pleasure. How about a job?"

"Take me back again," I pleaded. "Let me be a waiter again." He shook his head. "I've no vacancy. I can't turn a man away." This was a bitter blow. I had counted on Kesterman. "No—no, of course not," I stammered. He looked at me for several seconds in a queer sort of way.

"What were the numbers of your tables?" he asked.

"Fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen."

"Go back there. You can start to-morrow." And then it was that I broke down and wept. He was so terribly kind, that man. He made that job for me. He crowded in three extra tables, and they were always filled; so therefore were his pockets. God-like, kind and worldly-wise, that was Gustave Kesterman.

I found lodgings for Phyllis and myself. We had a big attic with a bedroom leading out of it. Phyllis had the bedroom, and I slept on a camp-bed in the living-room. Of course there was a great racket and many unpleasant interviews. In the end, Mona divorced me and Bowen divorced Phyllis, and I paid as much money to everybody all round as the judge thought I ought to do, and my means allowed. Meanwhile, I was living with Phyllis, in a state of blissful virtue. How could I have been such a fool? But I had to sweat the lardy-dah notions out of my system, and Phyllis was patient with me, and wise too, in her own way. It is only I that am tossed hither and thither like a scrap of paper on muddy waters. But my body is laid between her and her folly. That is my happiness.

# Health

## John Pudney

He put out his hand for a cigarette. Yellow daylight filled the strange room. He fumbled with the packet, his eyes half-closed against waking, against the strident light. The candlestick slid away from him and rattled down, spilling matches across the floor. That wakened him; and he crouched on the edge of the bed lighting the cigarette.

When he was back in bed he cursed because he had not pulled the curtains across. Cold air blew in upon him, so that it was impossible to doze. It was violent and fresh, this summer morning, and it made him feel dirty. It was eight o'clock and the house was still quiet. The maid would come perhaps. Fanny had one maid who looked after the children.

Fanny. How many years ago was it since Fanny kissed him gravely on the forehead and said she hated the sight of him? It was a summer morning like this, and he was seventeen, standing in the garden after breakfast, telling himself that he was in love with Fanny, in love with Fanny. Fifteen years ago; and now she invited him down to Larkhouse casually because he was a novelist; and because she moved among interesting people. He had made the journey, wondering why he shouldn't, telling himself that there was no reason on earth to prevent him from coming. James Tabbithorne frequently talked to himself.

Curious that there was nobody about, not even the children. Should I be up, he thought, or still asleep? Fanny's house is so strange. It has a kind of school-room vitality, as if everyone is waiting to hear the next bell.

The fingers of his right hand were yellowy with cigarette smoking. He glanced at them as he lay back on his pillow and he wondered if other people noticed them. People would look at him distantly, allowing a hint of indifference to creep into the voice. They would discard him with a gesture. He knew it all, his failure to hold people. He pitied himself for it. He was cultivated because of his tongue, because of his pen. The reason why he was dropped was a profound mystery to him. The trouble was that he cared about it. This sensitivity was part of the nature of James Tabbithorne.

When he heard whispering outside the door, he cleared his throat to show that he was awake, and ran his fingers hastily through his hair so as not to look ruffled and sleep-sodden. They banged on the door. "Tabby," they shouted, "Tabby, wake up!"

He remembered them, their hot, embarrassing fingers pulling at his lapels, asking him for a nickname, what he had been called for short. He remembered their startling brown bodies on the lawn in the twilight before dinner.

"They've a craze for nicknames," Fanny had said when he arrived. "You must think of one, James. Annette's thirteen, and ought to know better. She's christened Batsy; and Joseph, he's ten. He's plain Josh."

James Tabbithorne, feeling them pressing against him, strangely light like the ripe corn, had tried to think if anyone had given him a nickname. No, of course, they hadn't. But at school, yes, when he was a new boy, they had said, "Tabby" in derision. So he said "Tabby" to Fanny's children, rather pleased to be called by the strange name.

"Wake up, Tabby. You said you would." They began to laugh, and then the door was thrown open and they were in the room. James pulled the bedclothes round himself. He was convinced that they would pull him out of bed.

"Smoking!" said Batsy. "Did you ever hear of anything like that? A man smoking in bed!"

"Tabby smoking in bed!" shouted Josh. Everybody in the house must have heard that. Everybody in the house would hear him pulled out of bed. Tabby, in self-defence, began to reason with Josh and Batsy.

"Can you imagine a man," he said to Josh, "who didn't smoke in bed? Do you think that any grown-up man could be reasonably expected to get up in the morning without having smoked in bed?"

They were impressed. They had seen very few grown-up men in bed and it occurred to them that Tabby was teaching them something. It would be a pity to destroy Tabby's smoke.

"You're going to take us, aren't you?" they said.

"Where to?"

"Swimming—in your car."

He had promised them while they were helping him back the car away the night before. He had been anxious to please them, to be friendly with Fanny's children because of the dread he felt as soon as he was with Fanny. For her life at Larkhouse was alien to him; the events that had taken place there since his last visit; her marriage, Adrian's death, her children. Her children would be terrifying, he thought: he knew he would feel shy with them, he would wish to dismiss them brusquely as he usually managed to dismiss adolescent things—cabbages, he would say, and other green things; they are of no interest until they are cooked. Of what interest could they be to him, to his cosmopolitanism, to his wit, to that treasure of his, his sensibility. James Tabbithorne was

famous enough to be complacent about his consciousness: he knew what kind of sensibility to have. It had matured, worn smooth as a cigarette-case in the pocket. Coming down to see Fanny at Larkhouse was a bet with himself: but he knew she kept good company, and even though she had rather pointedly excluded Jeremy from the invitation, he would not be bored. An occasional week-end away from Jeremy did one good. Poor Jeremy, he hated being without the car.

Josh sat heavily down upon James's feet and hiccuped because he had been eating an apple rather quickly.

"Would you care for the rest?" he said, "it'll keep you going till breakfast." He offered the half of a windfall from the garden. It was yellow, like the morning outside, and the same colour as Josh's hair. James forgot to answer.

"Let Tabby get up," said the girl, "or we won't be back for breakfast." She lugged her brother off the bed, causing James intense pain. She was tall and strong for her age, and she was warm-looking like a gipsy; not like their mother at all, either of them, thought Tabby, so quick-witted and warm, as if they had grown up out of the earth. Like Adrian, I suppose.

"Well, you go and get the garage open—while I dress," he said.

"You won't want much on," said Josh, who was wearing a striped singlet and pungent corduroy shorts.

"Go as you are, Tabby," said Batsy, helpfully.

Tabby sighed when they had shut the door. He felt as if he had been in danger. He felt intimidated, but nevertheless, a little stubborn. They had ordered him about, damn them! He looked at himself carefully, how he looked in blue pyjama tops and flannel trousers. And who, in the last twelve years, had ordered him about, had bothered to order him about?

The drive was a success.

"Decent car you've got." Josh examined the dashboard.

"Can you go any faster?" said Batsy.

"There's a straight bit of road round the next corner," said Josh, making sure about the speedometer, "she's marked up to 80 m.p.h., Batsy . . ."

"Well, do it!" She prodded Tabby and bounced up and down in the back of the car.

They nearly did it, the summer morning screaming by their ears, the scents of hay and hedge and lime rushing one after the other into the car. They glowed with the excitement of the air. But when they touched seventy between two corners, Tabby suddenly throttled down and used the brakes. He felt guilty, cursing himself for the excitement of the moment before. He who with Jeremy never did more than fifty-five, to do seventy, in cold blood, on an unknown road, with Fanny's kids! He felt sick at the thought of what might have happened. He wanted to tell them not to tell Fanny, but he didn't know how to begin. Batsy leant forward and put her arms round his shoulders, her fingers spreading out across his chest.

"Seventy!" she gasped, "did you see that, Josh? Dear Tabby!"

They felt the sun again, and they turned into a field where the river was. The children got out and began to run, and Tabby, carrying a bath towel, feeling like a nursemaid on her first job and wondering at the awe of such responsibility, ran too. Thank God his acquaintances could not see. He threw away a newly-lighted Turkish cigarette and concentrated on the unusual action.

They ran along the river bank toward an old hump-back bridge in the middle of the water meadows. They dodged willow trees and skipped the small inlets where the cattle came to drink. Buttercups and the wiry stalks of milkmaids caught at their ankles: and the ground was hard, cracked with the

long summer. Josh and Batsy reached the bridge and sat over the arch swinging their legs, and Tabby, emerging from the willows some two hundred yards behind, decided to walk the rest. He was sweating already and out of breath. His pyjama tops were billowing over his trousers and he longed to take them off and flop gently into the river with the cows. He loved the movement of swimming, the relaxation of the body so surely balanced in the water. Long ago he had practised secretly and seriously until he excelled at it.

"Come on, Tab," they shouted. "Buck up, Tabby."

He waved the huge towel at them and looked anxiously along the bank to see if the water got deeper. At the bridge the river was joined by a weedy, disused canal; and the confluence had once been guarded by a lock. It was seventy years since the canal had been used—to carry flour from the mill now called Old Mill Road-House on the Sutchester Bye-Pass Road—and all that remained was one half-sunken gate and a deep pool inhabited by an old pike who remembered the lock being made. Tabby noted with satisfaction the darker water by the bridge, and they shouted to him again.

"Come on, Tab," said Josh. "Undress up here. What do you bet me I don't go off the bridge?"

"Bet him nothing, Tabby. He only falls off," came Batsy's voice.

As he approached they ran down from the bridge to meet him. They were naked. Batsy opened her arms as she ran, treading gingerly because of the rough grass. She had the gait of a woman already, of Fanny, her mother, and, as she faced the sun, she shone a coppery gold colour. Her girl breasts threw no shadow. They were rigid when she ran.

"We'll wait for you," she said, taking the arm of Tabby who had driven at seventy miles an hour. But Josh fell in off the bridge and scrambled out, following them, shaking water

at them. He, too, was golden—there had been a long summer at Larkhouse—and his light hair was like spiky silver glass when he scattered water from it. Tabby wished he could have gone in like Josh, though the idea of swimming before breakfast was associated in his mind with habits like dirty eating.

"Well, I'm here," he said. "Let's see you dive, Batsy."

"Not till you're ready," she said.

"Me?" said Tabby. "Oh, I haven't got my things. I'm not good at early morning barbarism. I envy you"; he said that too personally; and he began to blush, posed like the grave photograph of a famous young author in front of the thirteen-year-old girl. Josh was barbarous, he kicked him with a wet muddy foot.

"Things?" cried Batsy.

"What *do* you want things for?" said Josh. "I don't wear things. I like feeling the water." He glanced up and down his perfectly shaped red-skinned body. "Just take 'em off and dump them like I have," he said.

"Yes, and do hurry up, Tabby," said Batsy, "you can't fuss about clothes now."

James Tabbithorne was left without words. He knew at once that he must dare. If he did not undress he would have to answer the question "Why not?" He shrunk from that, even as a liar may shrink from the final exonerating lie. He was ashamed, as if he were soiled, unhealthy, and deformed, instead of massaged, manicured, and as carefully kept as a racehorse. He knew he must dare.

"It's supposed to be very healthy—before breakfast," said Batsy as she sat on the bridge watching him undress.

"Healthy? Well, I've generally managed without it," he said. But he kept his head down not to see her hot black eyes and Josh's green eyes: and to himself he went on with the sentence: without what? not early morning bathing surely?

Why did she sit there like a woman, like a she-goddess spreading out her thighs on the parapet of the bridge. He dreaded her eyes upon him, inquisitive as he undressed slowly. He was abashed at the exhibtion of his dry chalky-white body by the side of Josh who pranced so small and so gainly. The James Tabbithorne who laughed metallically and said that he always got what he wanted examined with horror this sudden white cringing Tabby who feebly struggled with the invisible garments of a sensibility which did not fit.

"You *are* white," said Josh, "don't you ever go swimming?"

"I don't get all the time you do," Tabby answered like a schoolboy defending himself. He was angry because he was not brown like them. He was suddenly humiliated because he was naked. And Batsy laughed like Fanny, her mother, when he plunged about awkwardly trying to stand on one foot. It was mad, this. Why had he given way, frivolously given himself away?

He was being natural, he kept telling himself, he was being natural. When he stood up before them naked he said it again, in the teeth of the reproach of the calm August morning. His own jeers followed him on to the parapet of the bridge.

Then the three of them went in off the bridge, into the green pool, disturbing the artful sleep of the old pike who winked across at the white body of the man as if it were the devil himself. What shall I tell Fanny, thought the body as it rose gracefully to the surface.

Nobody but you would need to tell her anything. Nobody but you, James Tabbithorne, my sensitive friend.

# Amiable Confessions

## G. B. Stern

When I was about eight years old, I used to recite Shylock's Rialto speech because I heard my eldest sister do it, and I liked it, and it struck me as pretty good. In time I felt that a play ought to be written around it; so, ignoring what Shakespeare had already attempted in that line, I embodied:

> ". . . Many a time and oft
> In the Rialto you have rated me
> About my monies and my usances"—

into a fairy play of rhymed couplets, called "Under the Deodar", which I myself produced and insisted on playing the male lead, wearing a borrowed fancy-dress of King Charles II period, and calling myself the Autumn Elf. There were four other parts, and we acted the whole thing for charity three times running in one afternoon. Flushed with triumph, I said to myself, "I will be an actor!" This fatuous and conceited bit of autobiography is only significant in showing that I approached literature through the stage door.

Years later, when I was eighteen, still thinking "I will be an actor," I went to the Academy of Dramatic Art, and after I had spent two terms there, mostly playing bent old

labourers and withered old crones, the administrator, Mr. George Bancroft, came to me and said with an air of warm congratulation which at first misled me as to what was coming: "I hear you write as well as act, Miss Stern. I would go on writing if I were you!"

To return to my childhood. I wrote very little prose, in fact the only sustained piece of prose I can remember was a serial story called "The Favourite of the Guards". I think it must have been due to the influence of Ouida's *Under Two Flags,* gulped down much too early, much too swiftly, under cover of the dining-room table where no one could see me. "The Favourite of the Guards" did not go beyond a first instalment, and I returned for several years to plays and poetry, and composed an unending narrative poem in the metre of "Hiawatha"; a fatally easy metre; nothing to stop it anywhere. I called it "The Legend of the Edelweiss", and as I have kept a copy, I *may* be mistaken when I say that the theme was a mixture of "Endymion" and "Excelsior", by capital "E" association, no doubt.

I was so warmly encouraged to write, both at home, at school, and among my relations and friends, that it is a sheer miracle that the plant did not die of over-watering. The other day a cousin of my own age asked me whether I would like to see the only existing volume of a magazine which I had edited, and to which she and I and about three other school friends were ardent contributors between the ages, roughly speaking, of eleven and thirteen. She had come across it on a rummage through the box-room, and generously told me that though most of it was awful rubbish, some of my contributions were really first-class considering. I had no doubt of it, remembering how confident had been the flow, and how satisfied the guerdon of praise from my colleagues, who took it for granted that I was the moon that

would know no wane, and they merely the supporting planets. Therefore I said heartily that yes, I should enjoying seeing it very much. How amusing, I said.

The magazine was produced. I had better say at once that I have never had such a shock. My efforts were not appallingly bad in themselves, but very definitely below those of the other young contributors. Their styles, on the whole, were simple and straightforward and unassuming; childish, perhaps, but non-irritating. My style, if you can call it that, was showy, affected, and imitative. Apparently I had never heard of simplicity. My belated blushes grew hotter and hotter as I turned over the pages. It seems curious that adult judgment which had pronounced my writing the best when it was decidedly the worst, should have been justified to the extent that I was the only one of the five who actually did afterwards become a professional writer.

I hastily requested my cousin to burn the magazine, and have not the slightest doubt that she has decided to take no notice whatever of this command.

It must have been shortly after this school period that what I called my "pierrotic" period began. The pierrotic period extended from about fourteen to twenty, and can be seen curling and uncurling all over my first novels. It is easy to trace now the writers who beguiled me into that titled kingdom of pierrots and pierrettes, minstrels and dark red roses and round silver moons, mischievous elfin laugher, quaint tricks and wistful symbolism:

Ernest Dowson's *Pierrot of the Minute*, J. M. Barrie's *Pantaloon*. All the novels of Dion Clayton Calthrop, particularly a couple called *Perpetua* and *St. Quin*, and a jolly little odd volume called *The Harlequin Set*. Richard le Gallienne—I am not sure that he was not more responsible than all the others put together; surely *The Quest of the*

*Golden Girl* was something more than merely graceful and shocking? *An Old Country House,* by Richard le Gallienne was sort of given to me by an American lady. When I say, " sort of given to me ", I mean that I discovered among her effects this thick, small fascinating volume, bound in black leather, with a title on the front and the back; read it and adored it. The lady did not even appear to know she had it; she didn't care; she wouldn't notice; she'd never miss it (so I argued passionately). You see what happened, don't you? *The Old Country House* sort of became mine; years later, some brute, Christian name Nemesis, surname forgotten, reprehensibly stole it away from me; and as it was out of print and no bookshop ever seemed to have heard of it I advertised for it in *T.P.'s Weekly.* A vicar's daughter wrote me from the north of England, a book like that on the shelf among Daddy's books, but Daddy didn't ever read it, he didn't care, he wouldn't notice, he'd never miss it, she was so lonely, please, if I wanted it and if it wasn't too much to pay—was 3*s.* 6*d.* too much? I sent her 3*s.* 6*d.*, and got the book with all the love-passages marked, and marginal notes recommending herself to me in an aura of pierrotic romance. It occurred to me, then, that I had signed my letter G. B. Stern, and she had no indication that I was not a man. Her life, I daresay, was monotonous and dutiful. I was sorry to fail her, and I wondered if Daddy ever looked for *An Old Country House*?

I showed my copy the other day to Eva le Gallienne when she came to see me, and she felt very sentimental for a few minutes, remembering that Freya, one of the two little daughters who feature in it (in times before the word 'feature' had been discovered) was herself.

What other poet influenced my " Gilles " era? Of course: Laurence Housman; I am prepared to bet a Pierrotic silver

sixpence with a hole in it, that if I had *Prunella* in the house and scampered through it with every mature critical faculty on the alert, yet soon the old spell would revive.

And on my walls hung pictures by a painter called Kay Neilson, who elongated his pierrots shivering outside a locked door, and placed a rusty red moon for them to gaze at forlornly, and sent a few dead leaves drifting across a wan sky. This formula filled my soul to the brim with moping ecstasy; and so did a miming play called *L'enfant Prodigue*; and in a song "*Au Clair de la Lune*", I found it again. And in every tinsel harlequinade of every pantomime I ever saw. Here is a fragment of poem from the lumber-room of my teens; it will show, better than retrospective description, how far I had to travel towards some form of discipline:

LA FOLIE

Half joy, half sorrow
Is La Folie.
There is no to-morrow
For La Folie.

For "'Tis laugh while you may
And weep when you must,
We have only to-day,
And to-morrow we're dust,"
Says La Folie.

Half good, half evil
Is La Folie.
Beware of the devil
In La Folie.

And "'Tis work when you must
And enjoy while you can,
And put not your trust
In your enemy, Man,"
Says La Folie.

Half tears, half laughter
Is La Folie.
O what comes after,
For La Folie?

And "'Tis give him your heart
Like a woman true,
And let him break it
In half for you,"
Says La Folie.

And then I wrote my first novel *Pantomime* entirely in that strain, and half of my second novel *See-Saw*. And then, please, I gradually began to wake up. But the influence was so powerful that even now I have to take great care not to mix up fauns and moonlight and little men with pointed ears sitting on mushrooms, stricken punchinellos and big white ruffs and capital letters and dots and whimsical metaphors, with the more sober, more seemly style that I have acquired (I hope) in these latter years.

Authors' beginnings can be divided, roughly speaking, into the Gloomy and the Elfin. I am inclined to over-respect the Gloomy, I suppose because I belonged to the other school myself, Their first books are sombre, violent, and blood-stained; no gleam of humour anywhere. Sheila Kaye-Smith and Rose Macaulay belonged to this school; have you read *The Tramping Methodist* or the *Valley Captives*? For the other school, the harlequinade school, I claim Margaret Irwin with *Come out to Play,* Tennyson Jesse with the *Milky Way,* Noel Coward with an indescribably winsome wayward novel called *Cats and Dogs,* which he wrote when he was seventeen and destroyed when he was nineteen; but he showed it me in his *rôle* of disciple to *cher maître* (a *rôle* which he has since, to my great grief, abandoned). I approved of it on the whole, pointed out his faults and gave him much sage advice. But a

real *cher maître* of our harlequinade mood was writing at that time: Compton Mackenzie. How we licked up *Carnival* and loved it. I believe of the whole collection, it is the only one that still holds magic. His glamorous chapter titles gleam on the paper (the old style dies hard) like rose-coloured wine in a silvery chalice: "Birth of Columbine"; "Fairies at the Christening"; "Pretty Apples in Eden"; "The Ballet of Cupid"; "Rain on the Roof"; "Love's Halcyon"; "Columbine Asleep"; "Fête Galante"; "Columbine at Dawn"; "Columbine in the Dark"; "Columbine Happy"; "Shaded Sunlight"; "May Morning"; "Nightlight Time"; "Carni Vale". Rebecca West, with her peculiarly brilliant knack of catching what is elusive into a phrase said of it: "He gives an almost physical look to the page." On the other hand, the success of *Carnival* may have been less because of the "rose-coloured wine in a silvery chalice" stuff, than for the vivid jaunty realism in the portrait of Jenny Pearl, with her swaggering London chorus-girl jargon of a quarter of a century ago.

Surrendering to the *Carnival* enchantment, I at once wrote a story called "Pedlar o' Dreams" of which I was immeasurably proud. It was never published, and my literary guardian angels very kindly allowed me to lose the manuscript well and permanently.

I am not merely pretending harshness in my present attitude towards my past harlequinade exaltations. I really do feel a grim dislike of them and their elfish facile prettiness. And I see no necessity for looking back on my youth with the same tender tolerant half-indulgent smile with which one watches a puppy eating ones sequined evening slippers. On the contrary, I have an inclination to write "A Hymn to Middle Age", valuing the companions of my maturity, their austerities and astringencies, their palate for life; their subtle

understanding of what need not be said and of what can be taken for granted, varied by their sudden agreeable frankness, so far removed from mere juvenile crudeness of blurting out the truth; their taste, mellow, fastidious, that has learnt by experiences, good and bad, to reject a diet of sequins. One cannot be as critical and bored as one could wish over the tender youth of others, or one would be charged with jealousy; but at least one has the right to be properly harsh about one's own.

Once upon a time, once only that I can recall, I got up in the night, and wildly scrambled round for a paper and pencil, and wrote and wrote and wrote in the approved genius style, with ice-cold feet and flaming cheeks. I was about fifteen, and it was a poem, a dramatic narrative poem, called " Maid o' the Mist ". I could still recite portions of it, not because I madly admire it any more, but for a reason most embarrassing in retrospect: I have already stated it was a very long poem, it took about half an hour to recite it (with actions and expression). A hard-living, hard-hunting, hard-drinking Squire, a friend of our family, a magnificent boxer, a man who hardly ever touched a book, took an obstinate fancy to this poem, which he happened by accident to hear me repeat. One day he was staying with his wife at a large worldly hotel in Brighton, and I was their guest for the holidays. Because I was their guest, I felt that good manners demanded that I should refuse nothing they asked of me. It was asked of me by my hard-hunting, hard-living, hard-drinking friend that every night when the lounge was crowded I should stand up and recite " Maid o' the Mist " for the pleasure of those assembled. The manager of the hotel was a friend of his, and therefore did not have us turned out. He merely formed a prudent habit of remaining shut away in the bar. My audiences were more stunned and blighted than vindictive.

Naturally enough, they could not make out why this thing was being done to them. My friend the Squire never recovered from this mania, and refused to listen to my feeble protests: "A damn fine poem," he would say, "the sort of poem I like; by God, I could listen to it every night!" And by God he did, smiling and happy, in the belief that an enjoyable time was being had by all.

"Maid o' the Mist" was the story of a monk who lived in a monastery on the moors; what monastery and what moors, unspecified. The monk must have been suffering from influenza and too many oysters, for, sent riding one night across the moors in a storm to fetch a doctor for a sick Brother Aloysius, he had a vision of a white maiden doing Loreli stuff in front of him, flitting and beckoning, disappearing and reappearing and all the rest of it. So he followed her all through the night, and all through the storm, lost sight of her, crashed into a sandpit, and lay cursing and raving (for several pages) on the fate which had made him a monk and let him die before he had had any real fun. . . . Then the maid o' the mist reappeared and held him in her strange soft white embrace, while he spoke a few suitable words, and passed right out.

At school I was given more sober exercises in literature. Three of them I remember clearly. One was my voluntary translation of Schiller's *Das Lied von der Glocke* into English verse; sheer display and pageantry on my part, because I had had trouble, like all the rest of us, with the German mistress, a woman of iron temper who had once made me stay behind and learn the prepositions that govern the genitive, when I wanted to be, not unnaturally, at the dress rehearsal of one of my own plays, to be produced the next day in the Great Hall of the school, with the Headmistress in the front row and an audience of at least two hundred people,

funds to go to charity. If that wasn't glory for you! *The Legend o' the Echo* the play was called, and I was the Will o' the Wisp and had an electric light on my head worked from a small battery concealed in the pocket of my left hip. There's more glory for you! Science had advanced since then, but in 1903 I did not at all object to sharing my honours as author and actor with the electrician.

Anyhow, to return to the episode of the prepositions that governed the genitive ("*Unweit, mittels, kraft und wahrend, laut, vermöge, ungeachtet . . .*"). Fräulein was a brute and would allow no pardon on the grounds that I was suffering from a deranged mind that day. *The Legend o' the Echo* did not impress her. But my translation into mediocre English verse of *Das Lied von der Glocke* did impress her. It fair knocked her sideways and I had no trouble with her from that time onwards.

And then an enterprising literature mistress told the class to insert a scene into Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: " as much in Shakespeare's style as you can girls," showing the usurping Duke banishing his brother the real Duke. Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone all present.

" As much in Shakespeare's style as you can," presented no difficulties to me. I can imagine that if I were given the job now, I might flinch.

Finally, a sonnet on: " Whatever subject you like to choose," she said. I chose the Incident of the Baltic Fleet Sinking an English Fisher Boat. The last line rang out:

"For England will avenge her murdered sons."

Very powerful, and let us hope that England did. I forget the historical outcome of my exhortation.

Looking back through those haphazard memories, I am surprised to find how strongly the poetry element emerges. Yet

since I was eighteen, I have written nothing but prose. There is not the same careless rapture about writing prose. I would have wished to be a poet more than anything else in the world. But my gift for writing even lame poetry has done a "Maid o' the Mist" moonlight flit on me, and will not be recalled.

# Straw Hat

## Arthur Calder-Marshall

"First the Alhambra, then the Generalife, and finally the Cathedral," Runya said, as they came out of the hotel. She was a short woman, and when the wind ballooned her shantung cape she looked almost circular. Her shortness exaggerated Oscar's long body: his bowed back seemed even more bowed, next the practical thrust of her head and shoulders.

Oscar looked down at her affectionately and said, "I know that with your love of Gothic we'll have to take in the Cathedral, but let's see the Generalife first, or it'll be an anticlimax."

"It *is* a beautiful place," she said, "the water and the trees. All the greenery and shade of Spain concentrated in Granada." She thought: "The perfect life really, to be a Don's wife. The company of really cultured and intelligent people during term, and travel during the vacs. If there'd been children, that would never have been possible. And what we have's so fine, an intellectual companionship."

"D'you notice," said Oscar, "what makes this so different from England? All these trees, but not a bird. Remember the fellow we saw snaring them?"

"How they can eat them, that I cannot understand," said Runya. "Those little charred embryos. To watch the men digging their teeth into those tiny bald heads."

They walked on up the hill, she growing short of breath, struggling to keep pace with Oscar's long, swinging stride. Those legs striding across the moors, across mountains, climbing the Acropolis eagerly, pacing through Jerusalem, how many miles——she pattering by his side, how many miles more? Thirty-nine she was now. Thirty-nine, forty. Forty-nine, fifty. How many years more? "

"Well," she said, "you haven't said anything. I don't believe you've noticed."

"Of course, I've noticed," he answered, smiling. "It suits you very well."

"You think so? I'm so glad. I somehow thought you would like it." She cocked her head, so he could see the white, straw hat to advantage, small, stiff-brimmed, stuck centrally on her head. "It's smart," she said, "and yet it's simple."

"It's very becoming," Oscar said. "Very becoming. And you thought I hadn't noticed it! "

"I didn't really, dear. You're the most observant of husbands. But, you know, a woman always likes her clothes to be remarked on, as well as noticed. It's her lack of subtlety." She grasped Oscar's arm and squeezed it, incidentally slowing his pace down. "It'll be fifteen years since we were married, this October."

"I was thinking this morning," Oscar said, "—this is irrelevant, but it came back to my mind—that the Geographical Society might welcome a paper from me on Spain. What do you think? "

"I'm sure they would," his wife said. "Don't you remember how popular your paper was on our journey through the Holy Land? To tell you the truth, I had thought of delivering a lecture myself, to the W.I. But what position do you intend to take up? "

He smiled and said: "An amusing one. I shall urge that

the history of Spain must be regarded in the light of chronic dyspepsia. As a nation, they're riddled with indigestion. Imagine its cumulative, physical and spiritual effects on successive generations. I am convinced that cooking in olive oil has exerted a deeper influence on the national character of the Spanish than the Moors ever did."

She watched his face, lit up, as young and eager as when he had been an undergraduate. She laughed and said, " A lovely idea. It should provoke an amusing discussion. Perhaps C.K. might accept it for *Psyche*."

They were both walking, blind to surroundings, he looking at the ground as usual, she bent by physical exertion; when suddenly, like gulls diving on fool, gipsies swarmed on them with shrill cries. Some five or six, who seemed, so unanimously they attacked, to be a regiment. A regiment in bright, long-tasselled shawls and brighter skirts. Loud girls, whose lips shouted with rouge, whose hair, eyes, even whose hands, clamoured as much as their voices.

They looked up. It was broad daylight, the sun hot and brilliant; the road an ordinary road enough, even if dusty and deserted. Yet they felt as if they had fallen among thieves.

" *Guapa! Guapa!* " " Mon-ee." " Be-utiful lad-ee wants the good fortune told by 'er 'and? " The clamour broke the calm of conversation. They felt somehow stripped naked by these flashing girls.

Oscar tried to laugh, but he blushed. Blood surged through his body, wave on wave, making his eyes water. " No, *gracias. Gracias, nada!* " He tried to push away their pleading with his hand, turning his eyes from their soft, mocking faces. But their lithe bodies circled round. Their brown hands plucked at his sleeve, clacked castanets in their faces. They laughed shamelessly, thrusting out their gaudy, shoddy wares.

"Send them away, Oscar. Can't you tell them to go?"

"I can tell them to go, my dear, but you know they won't. The best thing is to take no notice of them."

A slender, dark girl, hair kiss-curling her ears, came so close to Runya that their thighs touched. She felt the sinewy strength of the girl's body, saw the impudent look of her eyes as she shouted, "*Linda, linda,* be-utiful lad-ee!" in her face.

Runya felt ridiculous. "Go away," she said. "I'm not beautiful. Go away, can't you?" She wanted to push the girl's young, painted face away from her. The gipsy laughed and showed her white teeth between scarlet lips.

"They're animals," she said to Oscar. "They're just animals."

But Oscar was hurrying to get the tickets for the Generalife. He turned at her voice, and turning saw a gipsy girl, walking behind his wife, mimicking her, bottom stuck out. She kept winking to the other gipsies, who were laughing. He felt rage at the insult, at the truth of it.

The girl stepped forward and with a flick of her hand, tilted the little straw hat over Runya's eyes. Runya stopped dead, unable to see. The absurd cock of the hat made her look tipsy, a dumpy, middle-aged woman who had drunk too much.

Laughter peeled up from the gipsies. Oscar stood, helpless at the break in convention, his heart dead and cold. The gipsies stood round her, hands on their hips, eyes aflame with joy, laughing and laughing. Runya was not his wife. She was nothing and less than nothing to him. He had no loyalty to the ridiculous, tipsy, little woman, whose hands went to her hat.

She took the hat off. Her lips were tight, her face pallid. Her hands were trembling. She shook herself like a hen after a dust bath. Deeper than loyalty or sympathy, laughter mounted in Oscar. His body shook with it. The most that

his will could do was to keep it silent. He felt he would burst with dammed-up laughter.

She was too blind with rage to see him. And before she had recovered he was at her side. "Do something to them, can't you?" she said. "Standing there like a mummy."

He opened his mouth. But he could say nothing to the gipsies. They had seen him laughing, an accessory after the fact. He turned round to give them an indignant look. But his lips twisted to a smile, as to say, "Forgive her. She's my wife. But I understand you, I understand." He saw the white teeth shining with laughter, their quick bodies, their dark eyes like the eyes of hares. Turning again, he stooped and whispered to Runya, "Come inside. You'll be free of them there." He went to get tickets and saw the gipsies were moving away downhill, still laughing.

Oscar went back to her with the tickets and put his hand on her shoulder, but she shook it off. There were tears in her eyes. "*You* were laughing," she said. "*You* were." She fronted him, standing stiffly erect, her cheeks flushed.

"I wasn't," he said earnestly. "Runya, I swear I wasn't. Come on and don't let them see you crying. Don't be so absurd."

She stood where she was, in full view of the lodge and the gates. "I don't care," she said. "I don't care who sees me. I want to go home." She pulled off her hat as if to tear it with her hands; then flung it on the gravel and kicked at it. He looked at it, lying on the path, the crown dinted.

"Runya," he began, "it suited you." But he stopped when she turned. The pupils of her eyes were contracted and hard, her mouth angry, the whole face gathered into rucks. The light, striking her head, picked out the greying hairs. She pushed at the air with her hand, as if warding off a dog.

He went to her and gently took her arm. Suiting his pace

to hers, he led her up the hill; neither speaking, until he, feeling the pressure of silence, cleared his throat and said, "To return to that paper I'm going to write, I think it was a good idea of yours to submit it to Ogden for *Psyche*."

She didn't answer.

# Fearful Symmetry

## N. De Ford

"Put nature on the rack and force her to bear witness."
—*Bacon.*

SOLITARY, in the great hall of the Hotel Esplanade-Méditerranée, Siegfried Ben Ali sat waiting.

He sat on a sofa with his back to the wall, opposite the row of windows which went towering from floor to ceiling, passed in a line of diminished perspective the whole length of the hall to meet the marble atrium at one end, the massive bronze and gold cage of the elevators at the other, at that hour as empty and deserted as the entrance to a royal tomb.

The air of the hall was spacious, the light tempered and subdued. The opaque Lalique glass of the windows excluded almost all of the fierce *midi* sunshine outside; only high up where the panes were veined with clear glass a few rays got through, and hung suspended in the air like golden banners pointing downwards, scarcely touching the chairs, tables, tripods, and sofas grouped below. Ben Ali sat with his head bent, just below the level of the descending light.

He had, by an immense act of his will, conquered the art of appearing self-possessed in public. Self-consciousness still tormented him, but he had, so far, taught himself to control its outward manifestations. His demeanour had become extremely arrogant. All Europeans were starers, he considered,

and he had learned to stare back, so insolently and so blankly that his mask-like face often had the effect of frightening people—but this prevented him from feeling frightened himself.

Drawn up close in front of him was a small table, furnished with a cup of coffee that was turning cold, and an unfolded newspaper. He stared past these as though his thoughts were heavily engaged elsewhere. Once he passed his hand over his smooth dark hair, smoothing it a little more, a gesture he would not have permitted himself had there been anybody there to observe him. But the guests of the Esplanade-Méditerranée were outside somewhere, sunning themselves on beaches and terraces over the bright blue sea. Ben Ali could see them with his mind's eye. They would be drinking cocktails and brandy, sprawling half-naked on canvas chairs, scraping the sand off their legs and rubbing oil in, joking, laughing, as their bodies fed in animal fashion from the heat and light, and getting drunk besides, which the animals would not do. Soon they would be back and overflow the place, glittering, restless, carnal. Ben Ali hated all crowds, and he always went where they were.

A click at the end of the hall, and he picked up his paper. He looked over it and saw the silhouette of a young man standing between the columns in the marble atrium. He turned as though to read, but he never for an instant lost his awareness of the figure approaching. The young man seemed fashioned to excite notice in even the most uninterested observer, both by the extraordinary quality of his beauty and by the fact that he was painfully crippled. His face, obviously English, had all the fresh colour of his race, the neatly finished line. He carried his head effortlessly, his crest of vigorous-springing hair flattened and burnished by good brushing. He leaned uncertainly on two sticks, shoving one foot just ahead

of the other. Two oddly contrived steel cages encased his legs for support. They clinked lightly, like armour, as he moved forward, looking neither to the right nor to the left, his clear face showing an Englishman's unconcern with either beauty or misfortune.

Ben Ali watched the afflicting progress over the edge of his paper. The young Englishman had come half-way the length of the hall and was heading for the elevator when he found his path blocked by a group of chairs and tables. He pushed at one of them impatiently as he tried to find a way through. The slight change of balance threw him forward and for an instant it seemed that he had lost his footing and would fall. But he seized the back of a chair with both hands, letting one of his sticks slip loose from his grasp and go rattling down between his legs. He straightened himself partially and spoke to Ben Ali over his shoulder.

"Sorry—but would you mind reaching me out my stick? "

The voice seemed to be a component part of the man's appearance, so accurately did it measure it.

Ben Ali had thrown down his paper when he had seen the man lurch forward. He fixed the tall figure with his arrogant stare, as though he had scarcely heard the request. Then he put out his hand and pushed the electric button under the table.

The Englishman stood perfectly still for a minute looking down at his feet. Then he struck the stick on the floor a blow that sent it rattling away under a settee, and started forward, staggering, as a grey-haired waiter came hurrying up behind him. "*La canne de Monsieur,*" said Ben Ali, motioning to the settee.

The waiter went on his hands and knees and gently resurrected the cane. "*Monsieur permet?*" he murmured, trying to force it into the hand of its owner. The owner had paused

and turned as soon as he heard Ben Ali speak. He looked at the stick as though he had forgotten it; then he looked at Ben Ali. He spoke to him in level tones, as the waiter disappeared.

"I am obliged to you for your courtesy. There seems to be a touch of royalty about you somewhere. Probably you are the king of boors."

"I am what you are," replied Ben Ali.

"Damn it—you're not," said the Englishman.

Ben Ali pushed the table to one side, slopping the coffee over the light driving-coat that lay across his lap. The expression of his face never altered, only the lips thinned in a cruel line. He looked the other over from top to toe.

"You have the advantage of me," he said.

The Englishman whitened. His lips went blue. He started violently, struggling to get possession of his prisoned legs, but found himself too unsteady, and so stood still, in complete disarray.

"By God—stand up," he said. "You miserable cad. You're not a man at all."

"No," said Ben Ali, "I'm not a man. I can't stand up to answer you." He turned his head and lifted the driving-coat from his knees, laying it on the sofa beside him. For the first time his body was fully exposed to the room. "Do you see?" he asked.

"Do you see?" he repeated. "I am more of a cripple than you are. I can't move an inch unless someone carries me. You must be the only person in the hotel that doesn't know it."

He raised his eyes to the clear glass at the top of the windows, from which the pure light was falling. A shifting of the sun had changed the rays to shimmering curtains. Tiny motes moved up and down through the curtains, like a shower of sparks before an uncertain vision. It all seemed to form the

back-drop of a stage for some Guignolesque performance. He could hear the shuffling steps approaching, and knew by a slight jar of the sofa and a resounding clink of metal that the other man was lowering himself into a chair at his side.

"Beastly show, isn't it?" said the young Englishman presently, after he had settled himself more comfortably into the chair. "Mind my sitting down here a minute? I can't get used to this damned apparatus—always afraid I'll trip and fall. And after eighteen months, too. I smashed myself and my plane trying to do a bit of stunting." He hesitated and a pleasant note of respect shaded his voice. "I suppose yours was the War, sir?"

Ben Ali looked at him again.

"No," he said. "I wasn't in the War. I've never been anything different. I was born this way."

He saw a muscle tighten in the Englishman's cheek. The blue eyes narrowed with a quick, restless look, then they smiled suddenly. "My name's Falconer," he said, leaning forward. "How about our having a spot of something together?" He stretched out his hand. "If you don't mind touching that bell again?"

Ben Ali felt a confusion settle on him, through which he was just aware of the return of the waiter and that he ordered whisky. The confusion deepened as he sat so intent on the figure of the man beside him. The face was so much more splendid than when he had watched it, sometimes, across a room. He could see now that the fresh, regular outline could not be counted on as a key. The face was moulded with an insistent subtlety, the whole corrected by many contradictions. It was wilful and fastidiously finished, apparent in its mark of race. The eyes changed in a broken rhythm from gaiety to severity as swiftly, as continually, as consistently, as a light in a building played on by a flag in full breeze.

"You're an American, aren't you?" Falconer was saying. "I think I have seen you before. You're the fellow that drives around in the big silver Hispano. You've nearly run me down twice." The shadow in his eyes flicked into light. "I was in a hack with cabby showing me the town when you came on us like a locomotive. You missed us by a split second. Never heard such a jangling of trolley-bells, or roaring of costermongers in my life. I wish you would take me out with you one day."

"Whenever you like," answered Ben Ali. "I always go alone."

Falconer drew out his cigarette-case and passed it across the table, took out a cigarette himself, tapped it, and turned to look down the hall after the waiter. The fringe of the curtain of light just touched the top of his head, bringing out on it a reddish glow, fireing each separate strand of the hair. He was wearing a loose brown coat thrown back, a blue silk handkerchief stuffed in the breast pocket, a thin, buff Fair-Isle sweater. At the waist, underneath the sweater, the line of the steel cage he sat in was just discernible.

Ben Ali saw the waiter appear in the distance, his grey head aureoled with the milky light of the marble atrium. He watched the glittering reflections of the tray and wondered if any whisky could still the nerve in his brain which was sending a current, hot as electricity, through his veins. "Friendship," he said to himself, "whose only accord is, perhaps, infirmity, but friendship none the less."

He lifted the driving-coat, drew it over his knees again. Then he leaned forward and striking a match, held up the light for his friend.

Wrapped in strange silks, they dined together in the sitting-room of Ben Ali's suite, the night of the fancy ball. The ball

was to be held in the hotel and was one of the season's fashionable galas. It was Falconer who suggested that they go together and that they wear costumes, for, he said, travesty was always cheering. He sent Frederick, Ben Ali's valet, into the town to choose them. So, in his sitting-room with the windows open on the dark bay, across a table for two, with a candle winking between them, Ben Ali sat done over, in the company of Nicholas Falconer—he in a black Chinese coat and a square mandarin's hat, Nikky in blue, flowing satin with a turban and a long aigrette.

It was the first time they had met anywhere outside Ben Ali's car. In that, they followed every afternoon the roads of sea and mountain. Falconer was pleased with the big Hispano, interested in every joint and screw that made up its magnificent competence. He praised the driver, too, for being more at home on a race-course than a thoroughfare, and applauded, though he lost colour usually, when the hair's-breadth hazards were accomplished on the death-trap curves of the Grande Corniche. To Ben Ali the imposing energy of his car had never seemed so necessary, the fearful pace so terrifying. Always, everything on the road had to give way before their Juggernaut progress. Peasants, errant royalty, natives, tourists stared with anger and envy after the two young men, sitting shoulder to shoulder on the scarlet cushions, bare-headed, like gods driven onward to a higher destiny. This envy of the street acted on Ben Ali like a drug, giving him a sense of respite, making each return the more intolerable, when they drew up on the gravel in front of the hotel, to a ring of waiting servants, and his helplessness and Nikky's were food again for anybody's eye.

The little dinner was drawing to a close. Falconer had become talkative under the champagne. He filled his glass repeatedly as he finished an account of a cricket-match, which

had been lost because of some indescribably bad play he had made.

"Do we look like Orientals?" he asked. "This is the ball of the Thousand and One Nights. The manager says so. Why the extra night, I wonder?" He took up the turban from the chair beside him and put it slantwise on his head and went on with the champagne. This was to be a real party, he explained, for—"I'm going back to England in a few days. I'd rather die in England if I have to."

A waiter came in with the cheese and brandy. Falconer turned and smiled at him and wished him "Good night."

The grace of the unconsidered gesture brought back to Ben Ali something of the shock he had had that morning, when he had learned for the first time that Nicholas Falconer was poor. He had thought, somehow, that it was the other way. It was his valet who had brought the new fact to his attention by informing him that Mr. Falconer was in a room at the top of the hotel that was generally used by servants—that he came to it at night very late and often very drunk, and was accustomed to rapping on the wall for the waiter who slept next door to come in and help him out. "He tips very generous indeed, but the gentleman should have his own man to look after him," Frederick observed prudently.

Ben Ali had never in his life had any form of illusion about money—especially his own. He had come into complete possession of all that he had when he was twenty-one. His mother, who had hated him openly, was even at that time his dependent, the kinder father having left the fortune to the son. This charge so early imposed on him of the creature who felt for nothing but bitterness and contempt had plainly marked his character. That she had been still young and touchingly beautiful, the knowledge of her disordered ways, had been a steadying point in spite of himself and had made

it possible to carry out his father's wish. When she was dead and her pursuing spite was over, his sense of possession deepened. As the years went by he became more and more grateful for this fortune, toilsomely amassed by his father, as the only thing he had that could count for him. He knew that it could purchase him neither ease nor pleasure. He believed it was the barrier that held him from self-extinction. To be able to change from one set of surroundings to another swiftly, luxuriously, continuously, gave an impression of fresh hope—and deceived and insulted desires were pacified and set on their feet again. How much of this did Nikky know, already, he wondered. What was he going to have to learn?

He was still thinking of this fortune as he was carried across the empty ballroom, his white face set under the square mandarin's hat. When he was seated on the sofa he noticed that it was the same room where he came sometimes in the afternoon to sit in the half-lights under the walls of palm and smilax and watch the women in their heavy furs and clinging satins tango to gentle music with their languid-looking escorts. Sometimes the professional, a thin Jew with a pince-nez, would come and sit with him awhile and Ben Ali would buy him a drink.

Under the brilliant lighting he saw, now, that it was a full-sized ballroom and that he was in his old place where he always sat. The walls of palm and smilax were left unchanged. Thousands of fresh flowers had been brought in, narcissus, mimosa, jasmine. No cardboard mosques and *papier-maché* minarets disturbed the effect. On each table stood a flowering plant, in front of him a rose-coloured azalea, in a pot. Above the confusion of odours he could smell the moist earth. He turned and looked for Falconer.

He saw him coming across the floor, his turban more aslant than ever. He was talking to the head-waiter, a small man

with giant moustaches. The floor had been heavily waxed for the dancing. The waiter kept his hand unobstrusively just behind the other's elbow.

The approach of the tall figure with the fat little waiter made Ben Ali lose faith suddenly in his metamorphosis. He knew the cruel edge of satire of the crowd, its equally cruel curiosity, that never in the face of all its distractions could it lose its taste for the next man's misfortune. Early in his life he had made up his mind never to brook an insult, and he believed that he had established a barricade and could live behind his wealth, his privacy, his air of arrogant contempt. It seemed to him that Falconer's almost impossible beauty must serve the same purpose. But now he doubted, as he watched the eyes of the idle waiters following the tall satin-clad figure. It was beauty, then, that made it so incongruous, that made the crucifixion so severe, so exposed to the obscenity of special notice and comment. He lowered his own eyes, hating himself for being where he was, garbed in the ridiculous raiment of a Chinaman.

Falconer shifted his body in the large chair that had been brought up, leaned forward and examined the champagne. He said he wanted a better mark. He took up a pencil and signed the cheque.

"I haven't done anything yet," he explained.

The orchestra started its untuneful scraping, winding up its instruments, the annoying prelude before the harmony to come. The scent of the flowers seemed to have redoubled. It was to Ben Ali like a summons from a lost world. He put out his hand to the flowering wall beside him, picked a spray of mimosa and crumpled it in his palm, letting the little yellow balls sift through his fingers and fall to the ground, one by one. He watched the bubbles of the champagne move up and down in his glass, sparkling out of the dark obscurity where

they had so long lain entombed. He could not see the source from which they apparently mounted inexhaustibly. Perhaps they were inexhaustible. Perhaps, then, this moment was eternal, and he would never finish this glass of champagne, or cease to smell the earth under the azalea, or come to the end of the small balls of mimosa that were dropping from his hand. If there were such a thing as an immortality of sensation he wished this might be his.

The waiters were putting finishing touches on the tables. A large woman with elaborately-waved grey hair moved like a general from one to another, scrutinizing the arrangements, conferring with the musicians. She came over to the table where the two men were sitting and smiled condescendingly at each. Ben Ali turned his dark eyes on her, and in them all the hatred and contempt he felt for her was plainly marked. Nikky took her on for a few minutes, and then dismissed her easily. "Gonzesse," he said aloud to her back as she moved away to welcome the first couples coming in under the green-arched doorway.

The softer orchestra had begun to play. Several couples glided out on the floor. The ball was open.

Soon the doorways were thronged with the crowds streaming in, Persians, Arabians, Indians, rajahs, dervishes, donkey boys—houris and princesses inadequately veiled. A party of three hailed Falconer and sat down at his table. Five more followed.

In the hubbub that was created by their festive intimacy Ben Ali found he could make out very little. But he saw among them a girl he thought was pretty, whom Nikky was addressing as Vera. He found that he liked to look at her. He did so once or twice as he was ordering a fresh load of champagne. When she returned his look he remembered that he had seen her before, one afternoon when he was

watching the tango. She had sat across the room with Falconer and had worn a short, white tennis dress which had marked her out on that sleek background of satin and fur. Apparently she was still wearing a tennis dress; but she had tied a coloured scarf around her slender hips, another on her head. Her arms and hands were bare. A necklace of glass beads finished her costume, of which every detail was unbecoming to her small, pale face, untouched by make-up under the crude head-band, her clear, grey eyes. She wore her ugly finery with an easy grace as though she were unaware of any fault in her appearance—perhaps indifferent to it. In a few minutes she moved to a place beside Ben Ali and thanked him for inviting her to the table.

"We came up from the Bristol," she said, "and were afraid we might find it too crowded. I thought I would find poor Nikky around here somewhere. I didn't recognize him at first. I think it is the only time in my life I ever saw him with his head covered. It's generally so easy to spy out the Golden Fleece." She leaned her arms on the table. Her small face was grave even when she talked. Her voice had the same light emphasis, the rich undercurrent, that marked Falconer's. She asked Ben Ali if he wasn't American. She was English, she told him, and had never been to America, but she heard that it was charming and very large. What part did he come from?

"New York," he answered. "Riverside Drive."

"It's a pretty name," said Vera. "It sounds rather like a golf course. Are you fond of golf?"

Ben Ali turned on her a slow, calculated look. It was the expression he reserved for people when he wanted them to feel they had made a mistake. "No," he said. "I have never played."

But if he expected to dismay her he found that it was he

who was making a mistake. She kept her grey eyes on his without shadow of turning, and asked him one or two more questions. Then she said: "As I haven't the faintest idea what your name is, I think I'll call you 'Rivers'—after that pretty place of yours." A moment later she rose to dance.

He continued to watch her for some minutes. The man who had taken her away was a tall young fellow, dressed, but not very well disguised, as a Persian prince. They had begun to dance the rumba. He saw that most of the girl's charm lay in her grace. She was certainly following the footsteps of her prince, but something in the precision of her movements made her seem to be giving the beat to the music. The young man tightened his hold on her. Vera lifted her face, aloof, and shy and confident. As they moved further away they became a part of the show that Ben Ali watched, somewhere, every day of his life. He knew that he didn't care to look at her or speak to her again.

He looked across the azalea at Falconer and saw that he was already drunk. He was reclining at ease in the large chair, his archangelic head thrown back. He had unbuttoned the blue satin at the neck, and pushed it away from his full bare throat. The restless light had left his eyes; they had a fixed severity as he smiled incessantly at two women who were leaning over him offering him champagne from their glasses. He put his hand over one of the girl's wrists, drew the glass down to his level and sipped the wine and pushed it back again to her flushed lips. Then he turned his head and looked steadily at the dancers. He straightened himself a little and drew his companion's attention to a French aviator he had spotted on the floor. As the dancers shifted the aviator passed close to the table, incredibly thin in his black unform, splendid with the decorations pinned across his chest. Falconer leaned forward, pushing the girl sideways

as he did so, and waved his hand to him as he went by. The Frenchman responded with the smallest formal bow.

Ben Ali lowered his eyes. In his fury his vision had become partially obscured. A scarlet ray shown out in the spectrum of his consciousness. He knew that he wanted to kill both the man who had delivered the snub and the woman who was leaning her arm on Falconer's shoulder.

"You mustn't be too hard on Nikky," said a gentle voice. It was Vera who had slipped back to the place beside him.

He waited for the scarlet line to disappear. In some special way the man's insult was, he felt, directed at himself, while the other—he lifted his hand, shielding his eyes from the too-strong light, and answered:

"He hasn't any will."

He heard the girl's voice from a distance. "I don't believe that is true. Nikky has his faults, but that isn't one of them." She seemed to reflect for a minute. "You see," she went on, "he's had a pretty bad time. Flat on his back on a board for a solid year, under chloroform most of the time. Afterwards there wasn't a doctor who came near him who didn't think he was awfully plucky the way he came back. As soon as he could stand he went out and tried to get himself a place as consul somewhere. But, of course, nobody could take him on, though he swore in a year he would be all right. When he came out here he was full of hope, he thought he was going to be better. But they have had to give that all up now, and of course, he knows it. They are only trying to keep him alive. You see, his heart is terribly weakened. You can't be drugged like that and not go to pieces somewhere." She turned the stem of her glass in her fingers. "It seems unfair, somehow. If you had known him before, you would understand what I mean. You couldn't have seen anyone handsomer than he was then."

"So he is going to die," said Ben Ali.

"Everybody thinks so. Nikky will never give up drinking just to stay alive." Her gentle tone was as impartial as Destiny's. The light of the hooded electric candles shone down on the bare lustre of her arms. There was not a bone showing in those rounded slender arms whose texture was like ivory's, only now and then a glint of muscle playing underneath. She looked at the seated man in blue satin opposite. Then she turned to her companion in the embroidered Chinese coat.

"After all," she said, "he's probably right. He hasn't very much to come back to. His people aren't well off. Just to sit around in the country with a lot of girls—there are so many extra girls where I come from—talking about tennis and hockey and all the games he can't play any more. A man is out of place like that, with nothing to do. And in the end, people get tired——"

She stopped abruptly this time. A flush that seemed to begin at her finger-tips passed through her body, making her skin look as though it were lit from inside.

"I am afraid," she said slowly, "we English think too much about our bodies. We don't, really, think about anything else. I have lived a great deal on the Continent and I know that other people feel differently—that they are more intelligent, that they are right."

"It is the English who are right," Ben Ali answered, "when they are suspicious of the unfit. That is what makes them kinder than other people. It's a cleaner mind that is not confused by pity."

"I don't quite understand what you mean," said Vera, "but I don't think we go that far. It's only that we are brought up to look at life as a game. So we are prepared to win or lose, I mean—we know when we have."

"It is a fortunate education," he replied.

Something in his tone brought a little colour again to her face. He had taken off the black hat. His smooth hair was sleeked back and he looked, somehow, very much younger—almost as young as Nikky. She drew back in bewilderment.

"Suppose," he asked her, "you have never known a bodily pleasure, that you are one of those, of whom, as you say, people are always tired? How do you imagine it feels? And where do we come in under your code? Even in England you have to deal with us somehow."

She raised her grey eyes to his. "I don't know," she said very gravely. "I have never thought about it. I don't think very much—I told you so. I am not a very imaginative person, Rivers."

The candle-light marked the delicate hollows of her cheeks with tiny shadows. Her throat rose childish and tender from the small round of the tennis dress.

"You are a very beautiful person," said Ben Ali.

She started and looked surprised and very shy. Evidently it was something she was not accustomed to hearing said. He managed to smile a little as she got up again to dance.

The quivering circle of the azalea blossoms grew and distended, swayed and rose above the disorder of the table. Someone had upset a glass of champagne and the pink paper at the base had a dark stain on it, as though the tree were bleeding inwardly from a secret wound.

Siegfried Ben Ali sat watching the spirit of carnival reach its height. Most of the tables had become tumultuous. Women who had not found partners were going out on the floor to seek them. Sprays of confetti went up, handfuls of cotton-wadding balls were pitched about in every direction. Whistles that blew out in gaudy paper parraketes were being distributed to the dancers. The lights were dimmed and the

floor had taken on the atmosphere of the jungle. In the orchestra a single drum pounded solemnly like a tom-tom. Cool in the midst of the *mêlée* moved the professional, immaculate in his evening clothes, his pince-nez glistening. He found his way over to Ben Ali and sat down and accepted a glass of champagne.

"You must have lost thirty pounds in two weeks," he commented. "I suppose you are delighted. Unless you have been ill? No? You must be taking some strong salts!"

He rose and asked a lady to dance, exchanging the close-up of his counter-jumper face for a full length of his exquisite back, his tall, thin figure.

"Goo'-bye," said a boy who was sitting at the table, waving his handkerchief. "Don't come back."

The lights went up. For the first time both orchestras ceased simultaneously. The air of the room became condensed with the shrill laughter of the people, the tinkling shock of glasses. A woman's voice was heard speaking. Then applause. "It's the prizes," someone said. "I bet on the huzzy in pink."

Ben Ali turned. He felt that he had been caught up in a machine and rent apart—that he was undressed and his miserable body exposed on the ballroom floor. He could see the grey-haired woman coming over the floor straight towards him, carrying two square be-ribboned boxes.

"The prizes," he said to himself, "she's going to give the prizes to us."

She stood over the table smiling down at Falconer and himself and laid a bundle in front of each of them. "These are for you, boys," she said.

There was a pile of confetti on the table. Ben Ali pushed the thing in front of him under the tangled strands.

Falconer handed his to the girl beside him to untie. She

tore off the wrappings with little cries of delight and unrolled a crystal and silver clock formed like a little temple. She clutched it lovingly. Falconer took it away from her and turned it in his hand a minute. Then he leaned forward, his face white, his eyes glittering, his mouth drawn down at one corner. He pushed the clock across the table to Ben Ali.

"A present for you, Siegfried," he said, "the fruit of my hands."

Ben Ali with a sudden motion pushed the clock over the edge of the table on to the floor. Someone laughed and the laughter covered the light crash of glass and silver.

"So it's a joke," said Falconer.

With the cessation of the dancing, Vera had sat down again with a troubled face. She put out her hand and touched the sleeve of Ben Ali's coat.

"I am sorry," she said simply.

"That's not necessary." He picked up a bottle and filled his glass, emptied it, and filled it again. He did not look at the girl, but straight across the table where Falconer's head lay on the cloth, pillowed between his two arms, his hands stretched out among the glasses. His turban had rolled off and the girl who had been sitting with her arm around him was wearing it.

Vera made a little sign to a young man who was passing. He stopped and asked her to dance. "You're a nice fellow, Rivers," she said as she rose. "I like you." She started to go out, then came back and leaned over his shoulder, pressing her little hand on the table—"We are going to meet again, aren't we?"

"Yes," said Ben Ali. "But not to-night."

She went out to her partner without uttering another word. He watched her move away on the throbbing music of a waltz. This time she did not come back.

Nobody came back. The whisky was exhausted, the supply of champagne cut off. Soon he sat quite alone over Falconer's prostrate figure. He tried to keep his eyes away from the bowed shoulders in their gay covering, the head crushed on the table, the back of the bared neck where the hair grew so fine and close, as he waited for it all to end. Only a few couples continued, but they seemed indefatigable. Someone had opened a window opposite, and he was surprised to see it was still night. Among the dancers still left was the decorated aviator whom Nikky had hailed so confidently earlier in the evening. He was doing an elaborate figure of the tango and came quite close to where Ben Ali was sitting. A French girl with a heavily-crimsoned mouth was balanced exactly in his arms. She was taking great pains how she placed her small, arched feet. She looked down at the fallen figure and said something to her partner about "*l'Anglais*," and she began to laugh, the frank, mocking laugh of the harlot.

Ben Ali put both hands on the table and hoisted his shoulders as though about to rise, but remained fixed. Observing his face the Frenchman abruptly shifted his partner so that her back was towards him and finished the figure without a break. They also did not come back.

Already in one or two places the waiters, in a guarded manner, were beginning to clean up. They put their things behind them and stood flicking their napkins when any couple passed too close.

When the second orchestra stopped playing Ben Ali sent for Frederick and gave him his orders. "Stay as long as you are needed. I will wait here." He gave the necessary directions as Frederick and one of the waiters lifted out the unconscious body.

The clearing and dismantling of the tables had begun in earnest. Ben Ali dozed a little as he waited. He had not

slept the night before, but had spent the time in the big chair in the sitting-room, the room where he and Falconer had dined that evening. Now he turned as entirely as a child to the welcoming touch of sleep, for of any outlook at that minute he had none. It seemed that only a few seconds passed before Frederick was again at his elbow, summoning him.

As he was being taken back to his apartment he inquired after Nikky. "Mr. Falconer is in your room, sir," replied Frederick. "He came to himself in the elevator and went directly there. He said he wished to speak to you, sir."

"Did he go alone?"

"He did not seem entirely steady, sir, so I went with him as far as the apartment. He wished me to leave at once. He sat down and said he wished to speak to you."

Nikky held again the centre of the sitting-room, stretched in the large chair, his legs stuck out in front of him, the blue robe drawn closely round them. His head had fallen forward. The light from the shaded lamp on the low table threw a reflection on his sleeping face.

Silently Frederick went through the elaborate process of getting his master to bed. Ben Ali made no movement, letting the valet button his pyjamas for him and turn down the sheet in a neat line under his elbows.

"Shall I waken Mr. Falconer and get him to his room?" the man asked.

"No," said Ben Ali. "Throw a rug over him and turn out the light."

"You will ring if you want anything, sir," suggested Frederick, as he unlocked and drew open the long windows.

As soon as the valet had gone, Ben Ali turned off the lamp at the head of the bed and stared up into the dark. There was more than a full hour before even the beginning of the slow February dawn. He had used up his portion of sleep in

the ballroom. He knew it was impossible to begin again, as he lay waiting in a cold terror for the crisis of his physical restlessness, a knawing frenzy of the body for the movement of which it was deprived. He knew, with the terrible accent of nightmare, that he was prisoned in a straight-jacket, from which he would never get free, in which, one day, certainly, he would die, without the ability to rise and save himself. That powerless in this straight-jacket, some vision was withheld from him, known to everyone but himself, a riddle whose answer was only a trick of motion, of altitude. He began to listen intently for the sound of footsteps, voices, on the Esplanade below the window. It was useless for him to reason to his aid, to assure himself that at that hour the Esplanade was certainly empty. His mind felt as brittle as glass. He rocked his head from side to side, straining until the temple veins stood out, still listening intently for the non-existant footsteps, for whispers which would be unintelligible to him if they were there.

Presently he put up his hands to a pair of steel rings hanging above his head and drew himself up to a sitting posture. Slipping his arms through the rings he rested, his body swayed forward. He could not see down on to the Esplanade, he could not even see the bay, which was muffled in a thick fog. But he felt better seated. After all, it was his nearest possibility to normal effort and stature. There was a moon behind the fog. The room was filled with a thin opaline light. A little breeze came in from the water and cooled his body. The naked steel bit into his armpits, and this helped, too, a sharp corrective to his troubled mind. He expanded his lungs and absorbed the breeze, that had no sense of sea or salt in it, only the wandering, pungent odour of the accacias that lined the Esplanade. It was an odour to whip the blood to a greed of conquest and adventure. A thin, cruel smile

distorted his face, as he told himself that a few hours ago he had taken his place at a party, dressed in fancy clothes, and that he was being disordered by the smell of flowers. And he thought of Nikky, as he had seen him that afternoon sitting beside him in the car, his face to the wind, his eyes fixed on the dial—Nikky and himself, going from city to city, the world through.

The folded doors were open between the two rooms; from where he sat he could see the dark bulk of the chair, made larger by Falconer's figure. And this comforted him, too, for it was the only time since he was a child that anyone had ever shared with him the sorrows of a night. He discovered that he was going to sleep after all, and let himself down on the pillow.

As his eyes were closing his intent ears caught a sound in the other room, and he knew that Falconer was awake. There followed a shuffling, creaking noise and he turned on the light instantly.

Falconer was standing in the doorway, the pallor of his face accentuated by the dark background of the room he had just left, his eyes blinking in the sudden light. He seemed hardly able to hold himself erect. The other man threw his arm out sideways from the bed, a gesture that was involuntary, as there was the distance of the room between them.

"Hullo," said Nikky, "are you there?" He raised his stick and pointed towards the folded doors that divided the wall opposite the windows. "I'm going on now. I suppose I can get out that way?"

He looked around vaguely as though he were seeking a quick escape and might just as easily go out by the window.

"Sit down," said Ben Ali. "Wait a few minutes. I'll ring for Frederick."

Falconer stood at the foot of the bed, staring down at him.

His face twitched, suddenly, the muscles stiffened around his lips.

"Keep your valet for yourself," he said. "I'll not have him carrying me round half the night." He turned away. "*Debout, les damnés de la terre!*"

"You're drunk," said Ben Ali.

"You're right," said Falconer. "I am drunk, and I am also in your room. But I am going to get out as soon as I am able."

"What are you trying to do? Kill yourself?"

Falconer moved a shade nearer the bed. "Don't talk like a parson," he said. "Don't you think I've had enough of them? And it isn't your business, anyway. Good night."

He turned as he spoke and straightened his fine nervous shoulders until it was impossible to suppose that he was leaning on the sticks that he carried in his hands. Not a lock of his blond hair was out of order. The flame of youth in him seemed to burn beyond his head, invincible youth—youth undiminished and unappeased—cruel, rapacious, ardent, victorious. It was this, Ben Ali realized, that he had demanded to heal his irreparable solitude, this the man, of whom, a little earlier, he had thought, when the head lay abjectly on the table, "He belongs to me." Facing him now he felt that he was gazing into light, a light as powerful as the sun itself, as radiant, as disintegrating. The tall figure stood perfectly still as though time were balanced in its hand. Then the shoulders slackened, swayed a little.

"I am going to faint," said Nikky.

He began to tap with his stick until he found the foot of the bed, followed it, and sat down on the side, suddenly. He pressed his hands to his loins and dropped his head slowly forward.

"You had better lie down," said Ben Ali.

Falconer made an attempt to draw his armoured legs up

after him on the bed. He succeeded the second time and slipped down on his back with a sharp gasp that he managed to smother in a curse. He stared up at the ceiling. A grey shadow was growing on his face, a long trickle of sweat ran down one cheek from underneath his hair.

"Is there anything I can do?" Ben Ali asked.

"Could you put out the light?" said Nikky.

"You are too ill—I must have someone——" But seeing that he was to receive no reply of any kind he felt a quickening shame and turned the room into darkness. There he lay listening to the harsh, impeded breathing with the same attention he had bestowed on the empty Esplanade a little while before, only the sense of strain was different, for now the encirclement of the world, it's centre, had moved within reach of his ear and eye. It was the absolute whose movement shook the bed beneath him. Falconer's face lay in deep shadow. So he watched the hands fastened on the coverlet.

The hands relaxed. "My cigarettes," said Falconer. He made a gesture to what he believed was the direction of his breast pocket. Ben Ali took up his case and handed it to him.

"Light one," said Nikky, "stick it in my mouth."

But the cigarette fell out again immediately and began to burn a hole in the sheet. Falconer had began to choke. In an effort to speak he became worse, but Ben Ali made out that he was asking him to raise his head. He passed his arm under the pillow stretching it as far as it would go, turning it sideways to give the desired elevation, squeezing the muscles to their fullest force. The choking stopped; the agonized labouring of lungs and heart went on. Every quiver charged the supporting arm with a special current which was translated into the body of the other man. The arm seemed to have a detached life of its own, as it supported the weight, separated by a scant three inches of eiderdown, of the burnished head,

evocative of all imperishable beauty. He felt it turn from one side to the other in a struggle for breath.

With something of his accustomed arrogance, Ben Ali stared through the vaporous light that filled the room to the corners where the shadows were grouped like people watching. But the shadows thickened, approached. Then the night went dark with a clap and he felt a constriction of his chest, a quick muffling of his throat and mouth as, for the first and the only time in his life, he fainted.

He came to himself slowly and with great difficulty in knowing where he was. Bit by bit he pieced back the room. He tried to move his arm, but found it numb at the shoulder. Everything about him was numb and cold, only his reeling head seemed alive. He fought back knowledge and memory as he became aware again of the human figure lying at his side. The room was so still that he thought for a minute, without any particular feeling of any kind, that Falconer was dead. Then he heard a little broken sigh and knew that he was only sleeping. He had not given a single glance in his direction, but he was seeing him with extreme clearness all the same; indeed, he saw him double, and these impalpable visions etched on the retina of his eyeball were more comprehensive somehow than the flesh and blood Nikky—the figure extended beside him and the other figure standing at the foot of the bed, with shoulders high, looking down on him. It was to this last that he addressed himself with his fixed, arresting eyes.

"And so you despise me," he said, "you despise me. I know what you were thinking—you don't take any trouble to hide it—so I also know why you despise me. You despise me for the lack of those things which you consider go into the making of a man, which means my lack of opportunity. And how do you know, may I ask, given your opportunity, what I might not have been? With twenty or more years to build up

a body to foster and shelter my spirit? Even the accident that has brought you into my low category, you think, divides us further. You come tumbling out of the sky, probably due to your own clumsiness, but still with the superb conviction that you have willed the risk. And so you despise me because I was spilled out helpless from an unwilling womb, because my life was taken away from me before I was born. You stand there with your tragedy staked out in nobility and pride—and you despise me because you know that mine is ignoble and shameful. You despise me, too, because I know fear, not the open, agreed-on fear which is the common lot of mankind, but the other fear, the one that no one ever confesses, the fear of misuse."

A sudden circular light swept the room and disappeared. A gun sounded over the water, the morning excursion boat on its way to Cannes. The interruption turned Ben Ali's thoughts into a colder current. The standing figure of Falconer vanished from the room as instantly as the search-light.

He addressed himself to other forces. Was it not probable that, after all, in the hideous processes of life some people were turned out, not intended to be people at all, only débris? "But why give us instincts of men?" Ben Ali asked. "Deprive us of those instincts and we can pass our time on a sofa or in an asylum contentedly enough." His hand moved over the coverlet, twisting, pleating, pressing the cold linen of the sheet. A phrase he had picked up and stored away somewhere in his mind recurred to him with the light of prophecy. "*Etre assez sain pour être pathétique.*" In those six short words lay the meaning that separated him fatally from his every wish. The insufficiency was basic, it was unconquerable. To have enough health, which means enough mortality, to strike at the living core of human sympathy, not to be like a wandering, misbegotten dog that some people pat on the head, some kick

in the stomach, that the occasional person takes in, wipes down, and rescues, but never loves, because its sufferings, possibly its pre-natal ones, have been too great. No kindness will conquer that dog or teach him his lesson. It is the kicks which are, after all, the inevitable, that are the most kind.

A wave of intolerable agony passed over him, but it ceased immediately as such things must. He lay relieved and at peace, as a man crushed in a street accident lives in the small circle of his anæsthesia, hardly willing to breathe for fear he will remember the shock and be able to read his future.

The grey light of dawn was in the room. Behind it a light more vital and colourful was seeking to infiltrate, to tinge it. But the fog still hung close, impeding this consummation.

Ben Ali lifted his head from the pillow and looked at his companion.

Falconer was lying in the position of a recumbent knight on a tomb, his raised head tilted forward on the cushion, his legs drawn stiffly together. One hand, raised to his chest, still clutched the suffocating garment he had drawn aside. Half of his breast was bare. In the centre, two heavy purple scars intersected in a cross, burned into the flesh. In one corner a pulse, moving up and down, marked the unequal beat of his life. His face was very much altered in repose. It was still pale, but no longer unnaturally so. But the closed eyes, the scarcely compressed lips, still had the air of being sealed, as though a light, invisible membrane were drawn over them. Two lines, that seemed to have sprung up in the night, ran from the corners of his nostrils to his mouth. It was, perhaps, these more than anything else that made the expression so subdued, that gave it its final consign of defeat. On the sad, marred face the future was written ineradicably.

So the beauty should wither slowly, the last particle of strength be expended, the will decay, the angel become

creature, the body be handed over to the pity of women, the mockery of strangers, the vulgar ministrations and jests of servants.

"No," said Ben Ali.

He let his head fall back on the pillow and felt with his hand for the drawer of the night table, fumbled in it a minute until his fingers closed on something hard and smooth, and he drew out his pistol. He knew that there were six balls in it. Two would be sufficient.

He laid it carefully beside him and reflected for a minute. He smiled and passed his hand over his hair, smoothing it, and straightened the collar of his pyjamas. The light was deepening in the room. Somewhere behind the mist the sun was struggling to get up. When that happened everything would be finished, completely and properly. If only he had the courage to complete the gesture. He felt that he did have the courage, but that he must wait a minute to conquer the exhaustion that was slowing up his will instant by instant.

"Sleep," said Ben Ali.

As though the word had penetrated his brain, Falconer stirred. His eyeballs rolled under the closed lids. His lips parted, just showing the edges of his teeth. With an accent of surprise he pronounced a name:

"Marie-Céline?"

He muttered something about being sorry she had had to wait. His features contracted with effort, he rolled over on his side and threw his arm across his companion.

The weight of another's head fell on Ben Ali's shoulder, the heat of another's body went spattering through his veins, living fingers caressed his shrinking, miserable flesh, rose to his throat, sank back and came to rest, clasping his arm. "You're very merciful," a young voice murmured. He lay perfectly still, his indrawn breath held, his eyes turned to the

steel rings above him, staring as though the frontiers of the earth were rolled back. He thought he could see the beautiful face of his mother looking at him, her small eyes full of malice, the flicker of a scornful smile edging her thin lips. He raised his arm from under the empty pillow and laid his hand on the shining head on his shoulder, drew a lock of the lustrous hair through his fingers.

The sound of two shots exploded in the room, like the little dry bark of a *mitrailleuse.*

The still-living man lay with his head reversed on the pillow, his face a plaster mask, its expression scarcely altered. Only the eyes had opened immeasurably—and through them streamed the dregs of his resistances, the undying forces that directed his soul, love, hate, pride, anger, humiliation, despair —but above all and beyond all, a terrible reproach. These passed into the room like tangible creatures above the shattered head which lay on his breast, whose fountain of blood was seeping into his being.

The last flare of the imagination that was sinking to extinction glowed in the eyes that were closing, fixed them on the empty space above the foot of the bed.

The lips of the dying man just moved, "—when thou comest to thy kingdom——"

Too weak to raise his hand, he tried to bury the pistol in the bed clothes, as the full tide of the sun came up and flooded the room with light.

# End Pages

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ERSKINE CALDWELL is an American writer of some note; anyone who has liked *Tobacco Road* or *God's Little Acre* will find this story just as good.

PATRICK CARLETON's hobbies have taken him to many parts of the world, especially to the Near East, spending much of his time in research work in Archæology, Assyriology, and Natural History. This was after taking a first in Oriental languages at Cambridge.

MONICA REDLICH is a newcomer who has speedily made a name for herself. Leaving Westfield College with a brilliant academic record, she started reviewing for the *Spectator, John o' London,* and other journals. Her first novel, *Cheap Return,* stamped her as a real satirist, and is followed up by the still more successful *Consenting Party*. Among her other occupations she finds time to be a publisher's reader, and is engaged upon a study of Sterne.

MISS G. B. STERN is so well known for her famous books on Jewish life and character that she will not require any introducing; however, she has had a varied, active life and at one time went to be trained for the stage, but gave it up for writing. Her best known books are probably *Tents of Israel, Mosaic,* and *A Deputy was King*; also many short stories and plays—the *Amiable Confession* here printed gives a full, intimate insight into her life.

JOHN PUDNEY is a poet who is at the moment in the Empire Section of the B.B.C., and hopes soon to be a qualified announ-

cer. He mixes boating with writing poems and short stories, plays rugby in the winter, and drinks whenever and wherever possible. His two books of poetry are called *Open the Sky* and *Spring Encounter.*

ARTHUR CALDER-MARSHALL has not been down long from Oxford. While an undergraduate he edited the *Oxford Outlook.* He has published a number of short stories and two novels. Of one of these, *About Levy,* Mr. Harold Nicolson wrote: "I should be surprised if within ten years he did not stand in the very forefront of contemporary fiction."

MISS F. M. DUNN went to Somerville and later finished her education at Edinburgh. She has written stories and poems for *Punch* and the *Manchester Guardian* and is now living somewhere on the Broads.

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## THE MARCH STORY COMPETITION

We would like to correct an error in the announcement of the February Competition:

The winner's name was given as P. W. RADICE: it should have been CLAIRE RADICE. We apologize for the mistake.

The decided increase in the number of stories entered for this Competition seems to show that there are many who, in the words of *The Writer,* "can neither read nor write the stereotyped short story"; contributors could not do better than study the editor's notes at the beginning before sending in their stories—they will see that there is scarcely any limit to the material or manner of writing, but there is one important point—the stories must have some objective and succeed in hitting it. This may seem rather obvious, but we would say that the chief fault is that of *aimlessness.*

**BERNARD T. CROFT**
wins our prize of
£2 2s. 0d.
for his story
*Sixteen Revolt.*

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*The Reserved Seat*
by
ANNE BOXER
is highly commended.

M.E.F.